



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 18 JUL 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	07/18 Biden Middle East trip worth it?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/18/biden-middle-east-saudi-achieved-worth/
GIST	<p>The optics were not ideal, to put it mildly. Here was the president of the United States — the same politician who had vowed to turn Saudi Arabia into a “pariah” — striding up to a smirking Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman — the same willful royal whose alleged thuggery had spurred President Biden to make that vow — and extending his hand in a fist. The crown prince reciprocated with his own knuckles.</p> <p>It was the fist bump seen around the world. Biden was received Friday evening in the Saudi city of Jiddah, as part of a busy four-day itinerary that had taken him from stops in Israel and the West Bank to a regional summit of Arab states hosted by the Saudis. A lot was on the agenda as the Biden administration seeks to subtly reassert U.S. leadership in the Middle East and move along Israel’s rapprochement with an emerging crop of Arab partners.</p> <p>But the encounter with the crown prince, who U.S. intelligence officials believe responsible for the plot that led to the killing of Saudi dissident and Washington Post contributor Jamal Khashoggi, loomed above it all. The image was swiftly disseminated by the kingdom’s state media and prompted a global outcry.</p> <p>Rights activists and critics of Saudi autocracy, among others, saw a betrayal of values and a reminder of the impunity afforded to the crown prince. Khashoggi’s fiancée described the sight of Biden greeting the crown prince, known by his initials MBS, as “heartbreaking.” Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, said the meeting “suggests the crown prince is now accepted.”</p> <p>“The fist bump between President Biden and Mohammed bin Salman was worse than a handshake — it was shameful,” Washington Post Publisher and CEO Fred Ryan said in a statement. “It projected a level of intimacy and comfort that delivers to MBS the unwarranted redemption he has been desperately seeking.”</p> <p>There were alternate readings, too, as analysts spied a frostiness between the two leaders. “The fist bump is yet another sign that this is not the president’s comfort zone, and this is not a warm bilateral relationship,” Jon B. Alterman, director of the Middle East program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told The Post’s Dan Zak. “And it may not become a warm bilateral relationship under the president. But it <i>will</i> be a relationship.”</p> <p>There were conflicting accounts of how tough Biden was during hours of closed meetings, with the Saudis suggesting that Biden did not directly confront MBS over Khashoggi’s death, while the U.S. president insisted that he did. As Biden extended a formal invitation to the White House to UAE leader Mohammed bin Zayed, news emerged that Khashoggi’s ex-lawyer, U.S. citizen Asim Ghafoor, had been arrested and in the United Arab Emirates and sentenced to three years in prison for money laundering and tax evasion charges that critics say were trumped up.</p> <p>The reality of the situation, no matter the White House’s insistence on its commitment to human rights, is that the perceived urgency of the geopolitical moment outweighed whatever lingering outrage was felt in Washington over the misconduct of Arab monarchs. “Challenges you face today only make it a heck of a lot more important we spend time together,” Biden argued as his visit concluded Saturday.</p> <p>“The United States is clear-eyed about the challenges in the Middle East and about where we have the greatest capacity to help drive positive outcomes,” he said during his final remarks to a coalition of leaders</p>

from the Persian Gulf countries and some neighbors. “We will not walk away and leave the vacuum to be filled by China, Russia or Iran.”

But Biden headed home with few substantive deliverables to show. In the wake of the chaotic few months in energy markets, Biden did not come away with any guarantees from the Saudis and Emiratis to boost the global oil supply. This wasn’t particularly surprising. Experts had warned before Biden’s trip began that Riyadh and Abu Dhabi had limited extra capacity to inject into the markets.

Biden touted \$1 billion in U.S. funding to help address hunger in parts of the Middle East and North Africa and proffered a smaller amount of economic assistance to Palestinians. But the latter was not welcomed by many Palestinians, who have seen their aspirations for statehood wither on the vine and [successive U.S. administrations support a status quo](#) that only deepens Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories.

“It’s the same thing as [former president Donald] Trump: it’s this focus on economic prosperity without addressing the real problems,” Mariam Barghouti, a Palestinian writer and activist, [told the Financial Times](#). “It’s not money that we need. It’s the removal of checkpoints, it’s the removal of Israeli pressures not just on hospitals but on cultural institutions.”

“The two-state solution died a long time ago, and now so has the Palestinians’ strategic choice of relying on the West in their struggle for their national rights,” [wrote Gideon Levy in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz](#).

For Biden, the real thrust of the visit was more tectonic. U.S. officials hope to reposition themselves in the region’s shifting geopolitical landscape, as Israel and a clutch of Arab monarchies tighten cooperation in the face of mutual antagonist Iran. Tough rhetoric over the regime in Tehran — not Palestinian rights in Israel or civil rights for dissidents in Arab autocracies — dominated proceedings. New diplomatic initiatives may also redefine the region: Earlier last week, Biden participated in a virtual meeting of [the “I2U2” bloc](#), which brings together Israel, India, the UAE and the United States.

The Saudi decision to open its airspace to Israeli flights was hailed by Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid as “the first official step in normalization with Saudi Arabia.” Saudi officials, though, were far less enthusiastic in public about that outcome, emphasizing that the passage of these flights did not mean further steps were in motion. Normalization with Israel, they said, was still contingent on the emergence of a viable Palestinian state.

“Anyone expecting a checklist of achievements was looking at the wrong visit,” Hussein Ibish, senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told me. “Biden didn’t go with a checklist but a long-term agenda.”

Discussions about the price of oil, differences over human rights, negotiations for maintaining the cease-fire in Yemen — these are matters usually handled quietly with one’s interlocutors. “The trip went as well as it was ever likely to, and that, in a very subtle way, it achieved a lot by clarifying Washington’s seriousness about leading a loose but potent security coalition in the region,” Ibish added.

Other analysts are less convinced. “The trip was worth it to his hosts in Israel and Saudi Arabia who each got what they wanted: Carte blanche to the continuation of an apartheid system in Israel and an official end to the Saudi crown prince’s pariah status,” Randa Slim, senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, told me. “It is unclear what the U.S. got from this trip.”

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HEADLINE	07/18 Climate change push hospitals tipping point
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/07/18/climate-change-is-pushing-hospitals-tipping-point/
GIST	When an unprecedented heat wave baked the Pacific Northwest last July, emergency rooms sought any way possible to lower the core body temperatures of patients coming in droves with heat-related ailments.

Many emergency departments in the region began putting people in body bags filled with ice to help safely adjust their temperatures. But despite their lifesaving efforts, around 1,000 excess deaths occurred from the brutal heat.

The scramble to save lives paints the challenging reality that many hospitals and medical workers are facing again this year as severe weather-related health emergencies escalate because of extreme climate events.

“We unfortunately had a real live stress test here for the Pacific heat dome because the temperatures were so high and we had a 69-fold increase in hospital-related presentations,” said **Kristie L. Ebi**, the founder of the center for health and global environment at the **University of Washington**.

At the same time, the health care sector contributes significantly to the worsening climate crisis, representing nearly 8.5 percent of all U.S. emissions.

[According to an analysis conducted by World Weather Attribution](#), that excessive heat wave was made at least 150 times more likely from human-induced climate change.

Last fall, the editors of over a dozen health journals from across the globe simultaneously [published a joint editorial](#) calling for urgent climate action to avert catastrophic warming. Without it, the editorial said, rising temperatures will lead to more deaths from heart and lung illness, allergies, kidney problems and pregnancy complications.

“The greatest threat to global public health is the continued failure of world leaders to keep the global temperature rise below 1.5° C and to restore nature,” the authors wrote.

The **New England Journal of Medicine** went one step further this spring in launching a [series](#) focused on highlighting health hazards linked to planet-warming pollution, our colleague **Sarah Kaplan** reports.

Renee Salas, a researcher at the **Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment** at **Harvard University** and contributor to the series, says that doctors have a moral obligation to speak out against fossil-fuel use and other planet-warming activities.

“The burning of fossil fuels, the root cause of both air pollution and climate change, threaten medicine's core mission. They harm health and threaten health care delivery, making our jobs not only harder, but sometimes impossible.”

Too heavy of a lift?

As The Climate 202 reported [last month](#), 61 of the nation's largest hospital and health-sector companies have joined the [Health Sector Climate Pledge](#) to cut greenhouse-gas emissions in half by 2030.

The commitment is meant to help advance **President Biden**’s target of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 and includes more than 650 hospitals and thousands of providers, including two of the five largest U.S. private hospital and health systems, **Ascension** and **CommonSpirit Health**.

“The health care industry has come to realize that traditional health care accounts for only about 20 percent of an individual's (or community's) overall health,” said **Craig Cordola**, Ascension’s executive vice president and chief operating officer. “Social determinants and one's physical environment play an even greater role. It’s imperative that we focus where we can have the greatest impact.”

But Ebi said that it's difficult to uproot the entire energy system of a health facility. For one, cost is a major factor. Depending on the institution's profit margin, switching to sustainable machines that leak fewer greenhouse gases might not be possible given their routine expenses.

There are also some things that hospitals can't adjust, such as leaving the lights on overnight or being unable to reuse certain plastics for hygiene, to satisfy medical protocols.

What's on the horizon for hospitals

Still, Ebi mentioned that there are smaller opportunities that hospitals can — and should — be pursuing to reduce their carbon footprints, whether that be through energy and waste management or by working to improve the well-being of patient communities.

Each of the organizations that signed onto the pledge — which included public hospitals, health-care centers, pharmaceutical companies, medical-device makers and suppliers — are expected to develop climate-resilience plans for their facilities, including plans to support individuals or communities most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

According to Ebi, any plan should mention what she called the “low-hanging fruit,” including:

- Understanding your patient base, and how it could shift with climate change
- Outlining community vulnerabilities to global warming (for example, care centers that are based in a flood plain)
- Planning personnel schedules around forecast weather events, or rescheduling surgeries to ensure anticipated surge capacity
- Providing opportunities for patients that benefit their health and the environment, such as a garden to supply fresh food for the cafeteria

As for Ascension, the system aims to reach net-zero carbon and waste by 2040. In its climate-resilience plans, Cordola said it will work closely with the individuals and communities most vulnerable to the impacts of a warming planet.

“Our focus is on creating healthier communities, including reducing the effects of climate change,” he said. “Leading health systems like Ascension have a role to play in demonstrating our commitment to this work not only to others in the health care industry, but to other industries as well.”

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HEADLINE	07/18 Covid surging: muted warnings, murky data
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/18/us/covid-us-outlook.html
GIST	<p>CHICAGO — Covid-19 is surging around the United States again in what experts consider the most transmissible variant of the pandemic yet.</p> <p>But something is different this time: The public health authorities are holding back.</p> <p>In Chicago, where the county's Covid warning level was raised to “high” last week, the city's top doctor said there was no reason for residents to let the virus control their lives. The state health director in Louisiana likened a new rise in Covid cases there to a downpour — “a surge within a surge” — but characterized the situation as concerning but not alarming.</p> <p>And the public health officer in King County, Wash., Dr. Jeffrey Duchin, said on Thursday that officials were discussing reissuing a mask mandate but would prefer that the public mask up voluntarily. “We’re not going to be able to have infinite series of mandates forcing people to do this, that and the other,” he said.</p> <p>The latest surge, driven by a spike of BA.5 subvariant cases in this country since May, has sent infections rising in at least 40 states, particularly in the Great Plains, West and South. Hospitalizations have climbed by 20 percent in the last two weeks, leaving more than 40,000 people in American hospitals with the coronavirus on an average day.</p> <p>More than two years after the pandemic began, though, public health officials are sounding only quiet warnings amid a picture that they hope has been changed by vaccines, treatments and rising immunity.</p>

Deaths are rising, but only modestly so far in this new wave. And state and local public health officials say they also must now factor in a reality that is obvious along the streets from Seattle to New York City: Most Americans are meeting a new Covid wave with a collective shrug, shunning masks, joining crowds indoors and moving on from the endless barrage of virus warnings of months past.

“I feel strongly that you can’t just kind of cry wolf all the time,” said Dr. Allison Arwady, the commissioner of the Chicago health department, who said she will wait to see whether hospitals become strained before considering another citywide mask mandate. “I want to save the requirements around masks or updating vaccine requirements for when there’s a significant change.”

Complicating the country’s understanding of this BA.5 wave is a dearth of data. Not since the earliest months of the pandemic has there been so little precise information about the number of actual infections in the United States. As public testing sites have closed and at-home testing — if people test at all — has grown common, the publicly reported data has become scarce and spotty.

Still, experts say, the outlines of a new wave are undeniable.

“You don’t have to count every raindrop to know it’s raining,” said Dr. Joseph Kanter, Louisiana’s state health officer and medical director. “And it’s pouring right now.”

In that state, the health department analyzes a wide range of data to track the spread of the virus, including case counts, samples from a growing network of wastewater testing sites, test positivity rate and hospitalization metrics.

The BA.5 subvariant, which was first detected in South Africa in January and spread to a number of European countries, was responsible for 1 percent of cases in the United States in mid-May but now represents at least two-thirds of new cases in the country.

Anita Kurian, an assistant director for the health department in San Antonio, said cases have been rising in the area for six weeks in a row. But some measures, like the low number of deaths so far, suggest that the nation is entering a newer and less lethal stage of the pandemic where vaccines and treatments have significantly improved chances of survival, she said.

“We are nowhere at the level where we were with the previous surges,” she said.

So far, the current wave’s toll of hospitalizations and deaths pales in comparison to previous spikes. During the peak of the Omicron surge in early 2022, close to 159,000 people were hospitalized on any given day.

Experts caution that predicting the months ahead is difficult, particularly given the high transmissibility of BA.5. Words of caution from national health leaders have slowly increased in intensity in recent weeks.

Still, even as federal health authorities reiterated calls for people to test for Covid before attending large indoor gatherings or visiting especially vulnerable, immunocompromised people, they are striking a delicate balance, telling Americans that while they do not need to upend their lives, they must pay attention to the Covid threat.

“We should not let it disrupt our lives,” Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Mr. Biden’s chief medical adviser on the virus, said at a White House news briefing in which he added that new variants could continue to emerge. “But we cannot deny that it is a reality that we need to deal with.”

As health officials in many places have avoided issuing new virus restrictions during the latest surge, California has stood out as an exception. There, public health authorities have issued stark warnings and moved toward reimposing restrictions.

The warnings have been spurred by worrisome data, experts said. Walgreens said that more than half of the Covid tests administered at its California stores have returned with positive results. Surveys of wastewater in the Bay Area suggest this surge could be the biggest yet.

And the number of weekly deaths in Los Angeles County from the coronavirus has doubled from around 50 a month ago to 100 last week. The deaths are still below the levels of the winter Omicron surge, when more than 400 were dying weekly in the county.

Officials in Los Angeles say they plan to reinstate a countywide indoor mask mandate as early as the end of this month. Barbara Ferrer, the public health director in the county, said that even a slight increase in masking would help slow transmission of the virus.

“I’m like everyone else: I hate wearing that mask. But more than that, I hate the idea that I might accidentally transmit to somebody else,” Ms. Ferrer said. “That’s my biggest fear — that we’re so anxious to be done with this virus that we’re getting complacent.”

Charles Chiu, an infectious disease specialist and virologist at the University of California, San Francisco, says data emerging from patients suggests that BA.5 does not cause more severe disease in patients than other Omicron variants. But he says he is concerned that the variant is so infectious and so able to evade the protections of vaccination and prior infection that it could be unstoppable.

“It looks as if we are unable to control it,” he said.

Dr. Chiu said he was sympathetic to the plight of government officials seeking to mitigate the spread of the virus. They are up against a public that chafes at renewed directives, even in parts of the country where people were previously most willing to go along. In places where Covid mitigation measures are mandatory, like on New York subways, adherence to masking rules is increasingly spotty.

“Public health officers have an impossible task here,” Dr. Chiu said.

In New York City, rates of positive tests, cases and hospitalizations are all rising. But health officials have resisted reissuing mask mandates, and many residents have said they were not worried, counting on vaccines, immunity from prior infections and antivirals for protection from severe illness. The city no longer has a contact tracing system in place or requires proof of vaccination to enter restaurants.

In Louisiana, officials have watched hospitalizations of people with Covid rise in the state, but they say those numbers are still far lower than in previous surges when more than 2,000 residents were at times hospitalized.

“I feel much more empowered that we have the ability to protect ourselves,” Dr. Kanter said.

During the height of the Delta wave in Louisiana in 2021, about 20 percent of hospitalized Covid patients were on ventilators, according to Dr. Kanter, the state health officer and medical director. That figure fell to 10 percent during the state’s initial Omicron surge and now is below 5 percent.

For people who are most at risk of severe illness from Covid, a sense that public health warnings have diminished was little comfort, and in fact, made them worry more than ever about getting infected.

Neyda Bonilla, 48, of Mission, Texas, was diagnosed in April with breast cancer. With case counts rising in South Texas, she now fears that an infection as she undergoes chemotherapy could prove catastrophic for her health.

She has received all of the vaccines and boosters available to her, she said, and now wears a surgical mask in public and rarely leaves the house, except to work as an administrator at an ambulance company.

	<p>"I hope that people open their eyes," she said. "We should have never taken our masks off. This is not over."</p> <p>Yet even in some cities whose residents have taken precautions against Covid throughout the pandemic, the latest surge has not caused widespread alarm.</p> <p>In Berkeley, Calif., Jeff Shepler, the general manager of the Spanish Table, a specialty shop selling Iberian wine and food, said that he goes to Giants games across the Bay in San Francisco, recently attended a Pearl Jam concert at the Oakland Coliseum and does not hesitate to shake hands.</p> <p>"It got exhausting for me to wear a mask all day, every day," he said. "I'm at the point in my life where I've got the vaccine and I've had Covid. I figure I'm fairly safe."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/18 Ghana: first-ever outbreak of Marburg virus
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/07/18/ghana-first-ever-Marburg-outbreak/7811658132708/
GIST	<p>July 18 (UPI) -- Ghana has reported two cases of the highly infectious Marburg virus, the World Health Organization said, making it the first-ever outbreak of the disease in the West African nation.</p> <p>The intergovernmental health body announced Ghana had declared the outbreak Sunday in a statement after the WHO's Collaborating Center laboratory confirmed its results.</p> <p>According to the WHO, the samples were taken from two deceased and unrelated patients from the southern Ashanti region who exhibited symptoms of the disease, including diarrhea, fever, nausea and vomiting.</p> <p>The cases were identified as a 26-year-old man who died June 27, a day after checking into the hospital, and a 51-year-old man who died June 28, the same day he entered the hospital. Both patients had sought medical treatment at the same facility, it said.</p> <p>Ghana's healthy ministry said in a statement that 98 contacts have so far been identified and are under quarantine where they are being monitored. No new other suspected cases have been detected.</p> <p>The ministry said an initial test of the samples came back earlier this month and were then confirmed by the Institut Pasteur in Dakar, Senegal.</p> <p>"Health authorities have responded swiftly, getting a head start preparing for a possible outbreak," said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO regional director for Africa. "This is good because without immediate and decisive action, Marburg can easily get out of hand."</p> <p>Marburg is a rare but severe hemorrhagic fever that is related to Ebola, and was first recognized in Germany and Yugoslavia, which is now Serbia, in 1967, resulting in more than 31 infections, including seven deaths, during that first outbreak, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and prevention.</p> <p>The zoonotic virus transfers to humans from infected host animals, including monkeys, chimps and fruit bats, via blood and waste products, such as feces, the Mayo Clinic said, adding that after the initial transmission, the virus spreads between people through body fluids.</p> <p>Ghana's outbreak is only the second time one has been detected in West Africa after Guinea confirmed a single case in an outbreak that lasted only five weeks last fall.</p> <p>Other outbreaks have occurred in Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya South Africa and Uganda.</p> <p>Based on previous outbreaks, the virus has a fatality rate anywhere between 24% and 88%, the WHO said.</p>

	"Although there are no vaccines or antiviral treatments approved to treat the virus, supportive care -- rehydration with oral or intravenous fluids -- and treatment of specific symptoms, improves survival," it said.
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HEADLINE	07/18 Southern Europe battles wildfires, heatwave
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/southern-europe-battles-wildfires-heatwave-spreads-north-2022-07-18/
GIST	<p>MADRID/LISBON July 18 (Reuters) - A heatwave sweeping southern Europe that has caused hundreds of deaths and huge wildfires in past weeks showed some signs of abating on Monday but continued to move north, including towards Britain where authorities issued an extreme weather warning.</p> <p>Much of Europe is baking in a heatwave that scientists say is consistent with climate change and has pushed temperatures into the mid-40s Celsius (over 110 Fahrenheit) in some regions, with wildfires raging across tinder-dry countryside in Portugal, Spain and France.</p> <p>Temperatures in some parts of southern Europe began to ease over the weekend but thousands of firefighters across the region still battled to contain hundreds of wildfires and authorities said the risk of further blazes remained extremely high.</p> <p>Spain was facing the eighth and last day of a more than week-long heatwave on Monday, which caused more than 510 heat-related deaths, according to estimates from the Carlos III Health Institute.</p> <p>With fires burning thousands of hectares in Galicia, Castille and Leon, Catalonia, Extremadura and Andalusia, Spain mourned the death of one firefighter in the northwestern province of Zamora on Sunday evening. Almost the entire country faces a extreme fire risk.</p> <p>"There are never words to thank the immense work of those who fight the fires tirelessly," Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Sunday night in a condolence message on Twitter.</p> <p>More than 70,000 hectares (173,000 acres) have burnt in Spain so far this year, the worst year of the last decade, according to official data. Last month, a huge wildfire in Sierra de la Culebra, Castille and Leon, ravaged about 30,000 hectares of land.</p> <p>Spain also reported a second death caused by a wildfire after a fireman died on Sunday. A 69-year-old was found dead on Monday in Ferrerueta, in an area burned by flames, emergency authorities said. Local media said it was a farmer.</p> <p>In Portugal, temperatures dropped over the weekend, but the risk of wildfires remained very high across most of the country, according to the Portuguese Institute of Meteorology (IPMA).</p> <p>More than 1,000 firefighters, backed by 285 vehicles and 14 aircraft, were battling nine ongoing wildfires, mainly in the country's northern regions, authorities said.</p> <p>NATIONAL EMERGENCIES</p> <p>Belgium and Germany were among the countries expecting the heatwave to hit them in coming days.</p> <p>Britain was on course for its hottest day on record on Monday with temperatures forecast to hit 40 Celsius (Fahrenheit) for the first time, forcing train companies to cancel services, schools to close early and ministers to urge the public to stay at home.</p> <p>The government has triggered a "national emergency" alert as temperatures were forecast to surpass the 38.7C (102F) recorded in the Cambridge University Botanic Garden in 2019 on Monday and Tuesday.</p>

	<p>"We hoped we wouldn't get to this situation but for the first time ever we are forecasting greater than 40C in the UK," climate attribution scientist at the Met Office, Dr Nikos Christidis, said.</p> <p>"Climate change has already influenced the likelihood of temperature extremes in the UK. The chances of seeing 40C days in the UK could be as much as 10 times more likely in the current climate than under a natural climate unaffected by human influence," he said.</p> <p>In France, wildfires had spread over 11,000 hectares (27,000 acres) in the southwestern region of Gironde, and more than 14,000 people have been evacuated, regional authorities said on Sunday afternoon.</p> <p>More than 1,200 firefighters were trying to control the blazes, the authorities said in a statement.</p> <p>France issued red alerts, the highest possible, for several regions, with residents urged "to be extremely vigilant".</p> <p>In Italy, where smaller fires have blazed in recent days, forecasters expect temperatures above 40C in several regions in coming days.</p> <p>Switzerland also suffered the effects of the heatwave. Axpo, the operator of the Beznau nuclear plant, said it on Monday it was forced to reduce output so that it does not overheat the Aare river from which it draws its cooling water.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Russia: attack on Crimea is 'judgment day'
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/medvedev-wests-refusal-recognise-crimea-russian-is-threat-2022-07-17/
GIST	<p>MOSCOW, July 17 (Reuters) - The refusal of Ukraine and Western powers to recognise Moscow's control of Crimea poses a "systemic threat" for Russia and any outside attack on the region will prompt a "Judgment Day" response, former president Dmitry Medvedev said on Sunday.</p> <p>Russia annexed the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 after a pro-Moscow president in Kyiv was toppled amid mass street protests. Moscow then also backed pro-Russian armed separatists in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>In the event of an attack on Crimea, Medvedev was quoted by TASS news agency as saying, "Judgment Day will come very fast and hard. It will be very difficult to hide."</p> <p>Medvedev did not elaborate but has previously warned the United States of the dangers of attempting to punish a nuclear power such as Russia over its actions in Ukraine, saying this could endanger humanity.</p> <p>His comments were aired a day after a Ukrainian official suggested that Crimea, which most of the world still recognises as part of Ukraine, could be a target for U.S.-made HIMARS missiles, recently deployed by Kyiv as it battles Russian forces.</p> <p>Earlier on Sunday, Interfax news agency quoted Medvedev as telling World War Two veterans: "If any other state, be it Ukraine or NATO countries, believes that Crimea is not Russian, then this is a systemic threat for us."</p> <p>"This is a direct and an explicit threat, especially given what had happened to Crimea. Crimea returned to Russia," said Medvedev, who now serves as deputy chairman of the Russian Security Council.</p> <p>Vadym Skibitskyi, an official at Ukrainian military intelligence, was asked on Saturday in a televised interview if HIMARS could be used on targets in Crimea.</p>

	<p>He said Russia had carried out strikes on Ukrainian territory from Crimea and the Black Sea and so these were also justified targets.</p> <p>Crimea is of particular strategic importance to Russia as it includes the headquarters of its Black Sea fleet at Sevastopol.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Official: gas could fall below \$4/gal. soon
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/gasprices-amoshochstein-saudi-arabia/2022/07/17/id/1079177/
GIST	<p>Gas prices could drop below \$4 per gallon on average in the coming weeks, Amos Hochstein, the senior adviser of energy security to the Biden administration, told CBS News' "Face the Nation" on Sunday.</p> <p>Hochstein said many gas stations were already selling gas at less than \$4 per gallon, pointing out that just a few weeks ago the price was more than \$5.</p> <p>"This is the fastest decline rate that we've seen against a major increase of oil prices during a war in Europe, where one of the parties in the war [Russia] is the third-largest producer in the world," said Hochstein. "These are extraordinary circumstances."</p> <p>Hochstein, who accompanied President Joe Biden on his trip to Saudi Arabia over the weekend, said that "there is still more room to see additional steps in the coming weeks," based on discussions there and over the past several months and weeks with OPEC.</p> <p>Hochstein pointed out that just a few days before Biden announced his trip, OPEC+ announced a major change in policy with a 50% increase in oil supply for July and August.</p> <p>He also said that Biden intends to continue releasing 1 million barrels of oil a day from a national stockpile until the end of the year to help ease prices, stepping in until the private sector in the United States is able to increase production by about that same amount.</p> <p>Another idea to help decrease the cost of oil pushed by the Biden administration is putting a cap on the price of Russian oil that is sold so that it's not cutting back on the amount but rather the windfall profits Moscow can make off of it.</p> <p>Hochstein said that "we're now starting to have the conversations with the major consumers" regarding this idea and that at the G-7 a couple of weeks ago, they endorsed it as a good plan.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/18 Malaysia seizes \$18M illegal animal parts
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/asia-malaysia-animals-climate-and-environment-518f4ee0ed28e06775fbb14f565f0cf2
GIST	<p>PORT KLANG, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysian authorities said Monday they seized a container of African elephant tusks, pangolin scales and other animal skulls and bones estimated to be worth 80 million ringgit (\$18 million).</p> <p>The Customs Department said in a statement it discovered the contraband hidden behind sawn timber following checks on July 10 on a ship coming from Africa. This included 6,000 kilograms (13,227 pounds) of elephant tusks, 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of pangolin scales, 25 kilograms (55 pounds) of rhino horns and 300 kilograms (661 pounds) of animal skulls, bones and horns, it said.</p> <p>Investigations are ongoing on the importer and shipping agent, the department said without providing further details. It was unclear if the container was meant to be shipped to other parts of Asia. Ivory tusks, rhino horns and pangolin scales are believed to have medicinal properties and are in high demand in the region.</p>

HEADLINE	07/18 Zelensky fires top law enforcement officials
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/18/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#zelensky-fires-top-officials-venediktova-bakanov
GIST	<p>President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine fired his country's prosecutor general and the leader of its domestic intelligence agency on Sunday, the most significant shake-up in his government since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion in February.</p> <p>The dismissals of the prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, and Ivan Bakanov, the leader of the Security Service of Ukraine — and a childhood friend of the president — were announced in brief decrees. In a televised speech later Sunday night, Mr. Zelensky said he was responding to a large number of treason investigations opened into employees of law enforcement agencies, including the prosecutor general's office and the domestic security agency.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky's office ordered that Ms. Venediktova, who had assumed a prominent and very public role in Ukraine's efforts to prosecute Russian war crimes and atrocities, be removed from her position. Another decree did the same for Mr. Bakanov, citing "Article 47 of the Disciplinary Statute of the Armed Forces of Ukraine." That pertains to "failure to perform service duties, which led to human casualties or other grave consequences."</p> <p>A total of 651 cases of high treason had been opened against law enforcement personnel, Mr. Zelensky said in his speech — and that more than 60 employees of the prosecutor's office and the Security Service of Ukraine remained in occupied territory and were working against the state.</p> <p>"Such an array of crimes against the foundations of the national security of the state and the connections detected between the employees of the security forces of Ukraine and the special services of Russia pose very serious questions to the relevant leadership," Mr. Zelensky added.</p> <p>American officials said the moves reflect Mr. Zelensky's efforts to put more experienced leaders in key security positions.</p> <p>U.S. intelligence agencies have been providing huge amounts of information to Ukrainian partners. Officials emphasized on Sunday that the firing of Mr. Bakanov was not due to any mishandling of that intelligence or any major penetration of Ukraine's intelligence services by Russia.</p> <p>The Security Service of Ukraine, known by its Ukrainian initials S.B.U., is the main domestic security and intelligence authority in Ukraine and the successor to the local branch of the Soviet-era K.G.B. With 27,000 personnel, it is Europe's largest security agency, and faces calls for reform — by comparison, Britain's MI5 has just 4,400 employees, according to the Atlantic Council.</p> <p>While U.S. intelligence agencies have worked with the S.B.U., their main relationship during the war has been with Ukraine's military intelligence service.</p> <p>Before the invasion, most of Mr. Zelensky's cabinet had been a revolving door. But after it, senior personnel changes had been rare — until Sunday's firing of the two top law enforcement officials.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky's relationship with Mr. Bakanov dates back decades. Childhood friends, the two also worked in the entertainment industry — Mr. Zelensky as an actor and Mr. Bakanov as the director of the Kvartal 95 studio.</p> <p>Mr. Bakanov was one of several comedy industry veterans to follow Mr. Zelensky into government. Yet in spite of skepticism about their competence that was voiced by political opponents at home before Russia invaded Ukraine, Mr. Zelensky's government defied expectations by maintaining operations and coordinating the country's defense through the chaotic early months of the war.</p>

	<p>But other officials in Mr. Zelensky's government had blamed Mr. Bakanov for intelligence failures and for missteps that allowed the Russian army to capture the city of Kherson in the south of Ukraine with almost no fighting, and Mr. Zelensky was looking to replace him, Politico reported in June.</p> <p>After Ms. Venediktova was fired on Sunday, a court ordered the country's top anti-corruption agency, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, to investigate her failure to report property on an asset and income declaration that officials are required to submit.</p> <p>While it was not immediately clear who would replace Mr. Bakanov, the president's office named Oleksiy Symonenko as acting prosecutor general. Mr. Symonenko had served as Ms. Venediktova's deputy. In 2020, he was accused by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine of "illegally" interfering in a corruption investigation.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/18 Ukraine troops dismiss notion ceding land
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/18/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#its-tense-under-constant-fire-ukrainian-soldiers-dismiss-any-suggestion-that-they-cede-land
GIST	<p>DONETSK PROVINCE, Ukraine — Red flames crackled in the golden wheat field, the target of Russian artillery just minutes earlier. Nearby, the commander of a Ukrainian frontline unit was finishing his lunch of pasta from a tin bowl. As more incoming shells exploded in the fields, his men took cover in their bunkers.</p> <p>Life on the front lines in the eastern Donetsk region has seen little letup in recent weeks. Ukrainian soldiers serving there say they live under almost constant Russian artillery and aerial bombardment. The fields and hedgerows around them are charred and smoldering. Their days and nights are interspersed with the sharp bangs of outgoing Ukrainian artillery and the deeper, rumbling bursts of incoming fire.</p> <p>"It's tense," said the commander, Samson, 55, who, like most members of the Ukrainian military, asked to be identified by only his code name in accord with military protocol. "There is daily mortar fire, airplanes, helicopters, 'Grads.' They have a lot of ammunition." Grad, meaning hail, is the Russian acronym for a commonly used multiple rocket launcher system.</p> <p>After beginning an offensive against Ukraine's east in April, Russia made progress at a steady if grueling pace. But since seizing control of Luhansk Province two weeks ago, the Russians have lost some of that momentum. Ukrainian troops, forced to move to second- and third-line defensive positions, have mostly held their ground despite the onslaught of mortar shells and missiles.</p> <p>Outnumbered and outgunned, the Ukrainians say the success or failure of their fight will depend on whether they receive more and better arms. But they say they are determined to try to hold every inch of what is still theirs in Donetsk Province, despite heavy losses, and dismissed the suggestion that they cede territory or give up the fight as ludicrous. They have the conviction of their cause, they said, while the Russians lack purpose.</p> <p>"There is no choice," Serhii, 44, a career soldier with one unit, said. "We are protecting our country."</p> <p>Dug in in the woods and villages, Ukrainian troops fought off a Russian attack in early July, knocking out a group of tanks in a battle in the farming village of Verkhonokamianske, according to several accounts. The blow stalled the Russian advance and brought a lull in places on the front lines, soldiers said. Military doctors said they saw a drop in casualties arriving from the front for several days last week after the battle.</p> <p>Elsewhere, soldiers and officials recounted other successes. The Seversky Donetsk River and the swampy land to the north of the province remain a natural barrier. The deputy commander of a National Guard unit said his men prevented an attempted river crossing by Russian troops last week, destroying tanks and a pontoon bridge.</p>

	Another volunteer unit said they had stopped Russian tanks, which were already advancing south of the river, from also encroaching from the northwest.
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HEADLINE	07/17 Central banks ramp up inflation fight
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/17/business/economy/global-central-banks-inflation.html
GIST	<p>Central bankers around the world are lifting interest rates at an aggressive clip as rapid inflation persists and seeps into a broad array of goods and services, setting the global economy up for a lurch toward more expensive credit, lower stock and bond values and — potentially — a sharp pullback in economic activity.</p> <p>It's a moment unlike anything the international community has experienced in decades, as countries around the world try to bring rapid price increases under control before they become a more lasting part of the economy.</p> <p>Inflation has surged across many advanced and developing economies since early 2021 as strong demand for goods collided with shortages brought on by the pandemic. Central banks spent months hoping that economies would reopen and shipping routes would unclog, easing supply constraints, and that consumer spending would return to normal. That hasn't happened, and the war in Ukraine has only intensified the situation by disrupting oil and food supplies, pushing prices even higher.</p> <p>Global economic policymakers began responding in earnest this year, with at least 75 central banks lifting interest rates, many from historically low levels. While policymakers cannot do much to contain high energy prices, higher borrowing costs could help slow consumer and business demand to give supply a chance to catch up across an array of goods and services so that inflation does not continue indefinitely.</p> <p>The European Central Bank will meet this week and is expected to make its first rate increase since 2011, one that officials have signaled will most likely be only a quarter point but will probably be followed by a larger move in September.</p> <p>Other central banks have begun moving more aggressively already, with officials from Canada to the Philippines picking up the pace of rate increases in recent weeks amid fears that consumers and investors are beginning to expect steadily higher prices — a shift that could make inflation a more permanent feature of the economic backdrop. Federal Reserve officials have also hastened their response. They lifted borrowing costs in June by the most since 1994 and suggested that an even bigger move is possible, though several in recent days have suggested that speeding up again is not their preferred plan for the upcoming July meeting and that a second three-quarter-point increase is most likely.</p> <p>As interest rates jump around the world, making money that has been cheap for years more expensive to borrow, they are stoking fears among investors that the global economy could slow sharply — and that some countries could find themselves plunged into painful recessions. Commodity prices, some of which can serve as a barometer of expected consumer demand and global economic health, have dropped as investors grow jittery. International economic officials have warned that the path ahead could prove bumpy as central banks adjust policy and as the war in Ukraine heightens uncertainty.</p> <p>“It is going to be a tough 2022 — and possibly an even tougher 2023, with increased risk of recession,” Kristalina Georgieva, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund, said in a blog post on Wednesday. Ms. Georgieva argued that central banks need to react to inflation, saying that “acting now will hurt less than acting later.”</p> <p>Ms. Georgieva pointed out that about three-quarters of the institutions the fund tracks have raised interest rates since July 2021. Developed economies have lifted them by 1.7 percentage points on average, while emerging economies have moved by more than 3 percentage points.</p>

In recent years, emerging markets have often raised interest rates in anticipation of the Fed's slow and steady moves to avoid big swings in their currency values, which depend partly on interest rate differences across borders. But this set of rate increases is different: Inflation is running at its fastest pace in decades in many places, and a range of developed-economy central banks, including the European Central Bank, the Swiss National Bank, the Bank of Canada and the Reserve Bank of Australia, are joining — or may join — the Fed in pushing rates quickly higher.

"It's not something we've seen in the last few decades," said Bruce Kasman, chief economist and head of global economic research at JPMorgan Chase.

The last time so many major nations abruptly raised rates in tandem to fight such rapid inflation was in the 1980s, when the contours of global central banking were different: The 19-country euro currency bloc that the E.C.B. sets policy for did not exist yet, and global financial markets were less developed.

That so many central banks are now facing off against rapid inflation — and trying to control it by slowing their economies — increases the chance for market turmoil as an era of very low rates ends and as nations and companies try to adjust to changing capital flows. Those changing flows can influence whether countries and businesses are able to sell debt and other securities to raise money.

"Financial conditions have tightened due to rising, broad-based inflationary pressures, geopolitical uncertainty brought on by Russia's war against Ukraine, and a slowdown in global growth," Janet L. Yellen, the U.S. Treasury secretary, said in speech last week. "Now, portfolio investment is beginning to flow out of emerging markets."

For financial markets, the adjustment to higher interest rates could be "bumpy, there's no way around that," said George Goncalves, head of U.S. macro strategy at MUFG Securities Americas. And as rates move higher, stock and other asset prices may drift lower in a lasting way, as savers can receive higher paybacks on less-risky investments, like government debt.

"The incentive was to chase yield, and that would push markets to higher valuations than they would have had based on fundamentals," Mr. Goncalves said.

The simultaneous action also ramps up the risk that some nations could fall into a recession as consumers and companies pull back their spending.

Mr. Kasman estimates that the United States and Western Europe have a 40 percent chance of a recession within the next year. That risk stems both from central bank moves and upheaval from Russia's war in Ukraine, which shows no signs of ending. But if the recession can be averted now — leaving unemployment low, consumers still spending and inflation elevated — it could mean that the Fed and other central banks have to raise rates more later on to choke off growth and bring price increases down, he said.

Fed officials have said they still aspire to engineer what they often call a "soft landing," in which hiring and spending cool down enough to allow wage growth and prices to moderate, but not so much that it plunges the economy into a deep and painful downturn.

But inflation has proved uncomfortably stubborn. The latest Consumer Price Index reading in the United States exceeded analyst expectations at 9.1 percent. In Canada, inflation is running at its fastest pace since 1983. In the United Kingdom, it is similarly at a 40-year-high.

That underscores that global factors, including a constrained supply of consumer goods like cars and clothing and a spike in oil and food costs, are prompting much of the price surge. It also explains why so many central banks are staging a similar — and faster — response, even if doing so increases the risk of a recession.

The Bank of England was the first major central bank to [kick off rate increases back in December](#) and has been steadily raising rates since. Policymakers are increasingly worried about inflation creating a cost-of-living crisis in Britain and worry that higher rates could compound economic pain. At the same time, they have signaled that they could [act more forcefully](#), taking their cue from their global peers. There is a “willingness — should circumstances require — to adopt a faster pace of tightening,” Huw Pill, the chief economist of the Bank of England, [said this month](#).

“Many central banks are looking at this as a sort of existential question about getting inflation and inflation expectations down,” said Matthew Luzzetti, chief U.S. economist at Deutsche Bank.

The Fed raised rates by a quarter point in March, half a point in May, and three-quarters of a percentage point in June. While its officials have predicted that they will maintain that pace in July, they have also been clear that an even bigger rate increase is possible.

“Inflation has to be our focus, every meeting and every day,” Christopher Waller, a Fed governor, said during a speech last week. “The spending and pricing decisions people and businesses make every day depend on their expectations of future inflation, which in turn depend on whether they believe the Fed is sufficiently committed to its inflation target.”

The Bank of Canada has already gone for a full percentage point move, surprising investors last week with its largest move since 1998, while warning of more to come.

“With the economy clearly in excess demand, inflation high and broadening, and more businesses and consumers expecting high inflation to persist for longer, the Governing Council decided to front-load the path to higher interest rates,” the central bank’s policy-setting council said in a statement.

The central bank in the Philippines also surprised investors with a three-quarter point increase this month, and an array of other central banks have made big moves. More action is coming. Central banks around the world have been clear that they expect to keep moving borrowing costs higher into the autumn.

“I wouldn’t say we’re at peak tightening quite yet,” said Brendan McKenna, an economist at Wells Fargo. “We could go even more aggressive from here.”

A key question is what that will mean for the global economy. The World Bank in June projected in a report that global growth would slow sharply this year but remain positive. Still, there is “considerable” risk of a situation in which growth stagnates and inflation remains high, David Malpass, head of the World Bank, wrote.

If inflation does become entrenched, or even show signs of shifting expectations, central banks may have to respond even more aggressively than they are now, intentionally crushing growth.

Mr. Kasman said the open question, when it comes to the Fed, is: “How far have they gone toward the conclusion that they need to kick us in the teeth, here?”

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HEADLINE	07/18 Day 145 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/18/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-145-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has fired the country’s head of the security service and the prosecutor general, claiming more than 60 of their employees have been “working against” Ukraine in Russian-occupied territory. He added that 651 criminal proceedings had been registered relating to high treason and collaboration by employees of prosecutors’ offices, pretrial investigation bodies and other law enforcement agencies.

- **Russia is preparing for the next stage of its offensive in [Ukraine](#), according to Ukrainian military officials**, after Moscow said its forces would step up military operations in “all operational areas”. The Ukrainian military said Russia appeared to be regrouping units for an offensive towards Sloviansk, a symbolically important city held by Ukraine in the eastern region of Donetsk. The British defence ministry added that Russia was also reinforcing its defensive positions across the occupied areas in southern Ukraine.
- **1,346 civilians have been found dead in the Kyiv region after the retreat of Russian forces**, according to the region’s police chief. Andriy Nebytov said about 300 individuals were still missing, and that 700 of those killed were shot with small arms such as a handgun.
- **Russia has lost more than 30% of its land combat effectiveness and 50,000 of its soldiers have either died or been injured in the conflict**, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, the chief of the UK defence staff, told the BBC. The military chief added that Russia posed “the biggest threat” to the UK and that its challenge would endure for decades.
- **Mourners have [buried a four-year-old girl](#) who was killed by a Russian missile strike in the city of Vinnytsia**, in central Ukraine, last week. The killing of Liza Dmitrieva, who had Down’s syndrome, as she was pushed in a stroller through a crowded square was reported around the globe, becoming a poignant symbol of the heavy civilian cost of Russia’s invasion.
- **Russian missiles hit an industrial and infrastructure facility in Mykolaiv**, a shipbuilding centre and city near the Black Sea in southern Ukraine. Oleksandr Senkevych, the city’s mayor, said there was no immediate information about casualties.
- **A Russian attack on the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut in Donetsk has injured six people, including three children**, according to local media reports. The three injured children have shrapnel wounds, the Donetsk prosecutor’s office said.
- **A British man apparently being held captive by Russian forces in Ukraine has been shown in a video [appealing to Boris Johnson for help](#)**, saying he could face the death penalty. “I would say to Boris Johnson, if you can help, if you can influence President Zelenskyy ... or if you can influence President Putin, then please do,” John Harding, in his 50s and originally from Sunderland, said while interviewed by a Russian journalist. “People’s lives are depending on this. So if you can, please help.”
- **Russian police have detained journalist Marina Ovsyannikova**, who in March [interrupted a live TV broadcast to denounce the military action](#) in Ukraine, her lawyer has said. No official statement has been made, but her entourage posted a message on the journalist’s Telegram account on Sunday, according to Agence France-Presse. “Marina has been detained,” it read. “There is no information on where she is.”
- **Sunday marked the eighth anniversary of the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Donetsk in 2014**, which killed 298 people onboard. Russia denied involvement in the plane’s downing, despite the findings of an [international investigation](#) that found witnesses who saw an [anti-aircraft missile launcher](#) that had secretly crossed into Ukraine from Russia in the hours before it shot down the commercial flight. Iryna Venediktova, the prosecutor general of Ukraine, called for international action against Russia.
- **A Ukrainian cargo plane transporting munitions from Serbia to Bangladesh [crashed and exploded in northern Greece](#), killing all eight crew onboard**. Serbia’s defence minister, Nebojša Stefanović, said the plane was carrying 11.5 tonnes of military products, including illuminating mortar shells and training shells, and the buyer was the Bangladesh defence ministry. A Ukrainian foreign ministry spokesperson said all eight crew members onboard were Ukrainian citizens.
- **The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, will travel to Baku on Monday to seek more natural gas from Azerbaijan**, the EU’s executive said, as the EU seeks to reduce its reliance on Russian energy.
- **The European Union is to discuss tightening sanctions against Russia** on Monday, as Moscow is accused of using the captured Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant to store weapons and launch missiles on the surrounding regions of southern Ukraine.

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jul/18/send-us-a-man-to-do-your-job-so-we-can-sack-you-taliban-tell-female-officials
GIST	<p>The Taliban have asked women employees at Afghanistan's finance ministry to send a male relative to do their job a year after female public-sector workers were barred from government work and told to stay at home.</p> <p>Women who worked in government positions were sent home from their jobs shortly after the Taliban took power in August 2021, and have been paid heavily reduced salaries to do nothing.</p> <p>But several women told the Guardian they had received similar calls from Taliban officials requesting they recommend male relatives in their place, because the "workload in the office has increased and they need to hire a man instead of us", according to one woman who did not wish her identity to be revealed.</p> <p>Sima Bahous, executive director of UN Women, said in May: "Current restrictions on women's employment have been estimated to result in an immediate economic loss of up to \$1bn – or up to 5% of Afghanistan's GDP."</p> <p>"There is almost universal poverty in the country," she added. "An entire generation is threatened by food insecurity and malnutrition."</p> <p>Maryam*, 37, received a call from the HR department of the Afghan ministry of finance, where she had worked for more than 15 years. She said: "I was asked to introduce a male family member to replace me at the ministry, so I could be dismissed from the job."</p> <p>Her voice quivering with frustration, Maryam, who holds a master's degree in business management, said she had worked her way up over 15 years within the ministry to head of the department. "How can I easily introduce someone else to replace me?" she asked. "Would he be able to work as efficiently as I have for so many years?"</p> <p>"This is a difficult and technical position I was trained for and have years of experience in. And even if he could do the same work eventually, what would happen to me?"</p> <p>"Since they came [to power], the Taliban have demoted me, and reduced my salary from 60,000 Afghanis [£575] to AFN12,000. I cannot even afford my son's school fees. When I questioned this, an official rudely told me to get out of his office and said that my demotion was not negotiable."</p> <p>Several attempts by the Guardian to seek a response and clarification from Taliban officials at the ministry went unanswered. It is not clear if women from other state departments have also been asked to send male relatives to do their job. However, Maryam said she was aware of at least 60 female colleagues from the finance department who had received similar calls.</p> <p>"The Taliban have a history of eliminating women, so hearing this is not surprising or new," said Sahar Fetrat, assistant researcher with the women's rights division at Human Rights Watch (HRW), which has documented extensively the Taliban's atrocities against women since they took over Afghanistan.</p> <p>In a report this year, HRW investigated the loss of women's jobs and livelihoods in Ghazni province since August 2021, when the Taliban seized power in Kabul. "Nearly all the women interviewed who previously had paid employment had lost their jobs," an interviewee said in the report.</p> <p>"Only female healthcare workers and teachers can go to work. Women working in other fields are forced to stay home now."</p> <p>Fetrat said: "Within the Taliban's misogyny, women belong to men, as a property and an object representing the honour of the family."</p>

	<p>“Therefore, in some cases like this they give women’s jobs and titles to women’s male relatives, and in other cases like the hijab, they punish women’s close male relatives for women’s public conduct and clothing,” she added, referring to an earlier ban that criminalised women’s clothing. According to the decree, issued in May, the male “guardians” of women who appeared in public “uncovered” would be fined and jailed for the offence.</p> <p>Fetrat said these policies imposed new standards of “harmful behaviour in society, and that is normalisation of the objectification of women. It has a clear message for men, and especially younger men, that they ‘own’ women in their families and they must act as a moral authority and actively police women’s conduct.”</p> <p>Maryam and her colleagues are mobilising to protest against Taliban policy. “We do not accept their order and we will try to get them to change it,” she said.</p> <p>“We have created a group of female employees of the ministry. We are negotiating now, and we will demonstrate if they don’t hear us,” she added, urging the international community to extend support and solidarity.</p> <p>The country is in the grip of a severe economic and humanitarian crisis. According to the UN, 20 million people now face acute hunger, more than 9 million have been displaced since the Taliban took power, and severe drought has affected farming.</p> <p>* Name has been changed to protect her identity</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Fed to lift rates another .75 percentage pt?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/fed-officials-preparing-to-lift-interest-rates-by-another-0-75-percentage-point-11658068201?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos4
GIST	<p>Federal Reserve officials have signaled they are likely to raise interest rates by 0.75 percentage point later this month, for the second straight meeting, as part of an aggressive effort to combat high inflation.</p> <p>Policy makers left the door open to a larger, full-percentage-point increase at the July 26-27 gathering. But some of them simultaneously poured cold water on the idea in recent interviews and public comments ahead of their premeeting quiet period, which began Saturday.</p> <p>Some officials pointed to signs that economic activity was softening as they raise rates at a historically brisk pace. “You don’t want to overdo the rate increases. A 75-basis-point hike, folks, is huge,” Fed governor Christopher Waller said Thursday at a conference in Victor, Idaho. “Don’t say, ‘Because you’re not going 100, you’re not doing your job.’”</p> <p>Before last week, officials had signaled they were leaning toward a 0.75-point, or 75-basis-point, increase this month. After another scorching inflation report was released Wednesday, however, they indicated they would consider a full-point increase.</p> <p>“We knew this inflation report was going to be ugly, and it was. It was just uglier than we thought,” said Mr. Waller. But, he added, “we don’t want to make policy on one data point, and that’s kind of a critical thing.”</p> <p>The Labor Department reported the consumer-price index rose 9.1% in June from a year before, a new four-decade high, and showed inflation pressures broadening across the economy.</p> <p>Demand surged last year from the reopening of the economy and aggressive government stimulus. More recently, Russia’s war against Ukraine aggravated supply-chain disruptions and drove up energy and commodity prices.</p>

Fed officials have raised interest rates at their past three meetings, beginning with a quarter-point increase in March. They followed with a half-point rise in May and [a 0.75-point increase last month](#), the largest since 1994. The Fed hasn't raised rates by a full percentage point since it began using the federal-funds rate as its primary policy-setting tool in the early 1990s.

Moving rates up too dramatically could cause unnecessary weakness in the economy, Atlanta Fed President Raphael Bostic said Friday at a forum hosted by the Tampa Bay Business Journal in Florida. Other Fed officials [have signaled unease with the recent acceleration](#) in rate rises. "A rapid pace of rate increase brings about the risk of tightening policy more quickly than the economy and markets can adjust," said Kansas City President Esther George last week.

Since the Fed surprised markets with a larger-than-anticipated 0.75-point rate rise last month, investors have responded in ways that reflect growing worries about recession. Oil and commodity prices have tumbled, and long-term bond yields have declined.

On Friday, a University of Michigan survey of consumers' long-term inflation expectations fell to its lowest level in a year, which weakened the case for a 1-percentage-point rate rise. Fed officials keep a close watch on households' and businesses' [expectations of future inflation](#) because they believe such expectations can be self-fulfilling.

Market-based measures of future inflation have also drifted to their lowest levels since Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine in late February.

"They can take comfort from that," said Laurence Meyer, a former Fed governor. "This takes the pressure off of them. I don't think they want to go 100."

Investors and some analysts began anticipating [a one-percentage-point rate increase](#) at the July meeting after last Wednesday's inflation report, with interest-rate futures contracts implying an 80% probability later that day, according to CME Group.

"The markets may have gotten ahead of themselves," Mr. Waller said on Thursday. By Friday, the market implied probability had fallen to less than 30%.

Jay Bryson, chief economist at Wells Fargo, was among those to call for the larger rate rise last week. But on Friday, he said the case had become less compelling. "It'll be on the table, but trying to get a consensus or a supermajority to go for 100 seems a little bit aggressive," he said.

Raising rates by a full percentage point could complicate how officials explain their policy strategy going forward. "If you are going to do 100, you better have a damned good story. They don't have one now," said Mr. Meyer, who runs the forecasting firm LH Meyer. Officials would have to clarify what had prompted another shift, and what would lead them to maintain an even more aggressive pace, for example.

A 0.75-point rate rise could allow officials to signal their ability to maintain that historically aggressive pace if demand and inflation stay hot or to moderate their increases if they see progress in slowing inflation and economic activity.

Officials could face more difficult decisions later this year over how much higher to push rates, especially if the economy shows more obvious signs of slowing, but with inflation still well above the Fed's 2% target.

Richmond Fed President Tom Barkin said last week he is focused on raising rates above the inflation level that investors are expecting over the next two years. "Any particular 25-basis-point [change] is not nearly as important to me as the destination," he [said in an interview](#).

Stronger-than-anticipated inflation could change that destination, giving urgency to raise rates faster and higher than otherwise. St. Louis Fed President James Bullard said Friday he anticipates lifting the fed-funds rate to just below 4% by December, up from his previous projection of around 3.5%.

With another 0.75-point rate rise at the coming meeting, the Fed will have raised the fed-funds rate by as much in the past five months as its combined increases between 2015 and 2018. It would lift the rate to a range between 2.25% and 2.5%, closer to officials' estimates of a neutral rate that neither stimulates nor restricts demand.

Officials are seeking to raise rates to levels that slow spending, investment and hiring by reducing demand. "They got back to neutral fast," said Mr. Bryson of Wells Fargo. "Now it's a question of how fast do they get into restrictive territory, and how restrictive do they get."

Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal this month put the chance of a recession sometime in the next 12 months at 49%. Most of the 62 respondents expect the central bank to raise the fed-funds rate at least above 3.25% by the end of the year and to maintain it at or above that level through next year. Most expect the Fed's first rate cut to occur by the end of 2023.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell has said in recent public appearances that it will get harder for the Fed to bring down inflation without a recession if energy prices continue to rise or supply-chain bottlenecks don't improve. Ideally, officials would slow growth enough to cool price pressures but not so much that the economy tips into a downturn.

"There's no guarantee we can do that," Mr. Powell said last month. "The pathways have gotten narrower."

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HEADLINE	07/18 New round mass Covid tests: 2 China cities
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/shanghai-tianjin-order-new-round-of-mass-covid-19-tests-11658129499?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>HONG KONG—Two of China's biggest cities ordered residents to undergo mass Covid-19 tests this week, highlighting the risk that fresh outbreaks could trigger new and economically costly lockdowns.</p> <p>Authorities in Tianjin, a northeastern metropolis of more than 13 million people, ordered citywide tests on residents to screen for coronavirus infections starting Monday evening, after reporting two new cases earlier in the day. These were the first locally transmitted infections detected in more than a week in the home to the biggest port in northern China and the main maritime gateway to Beijing.</p> <p>Shanghai's government said it would require residents across nine districts and other administrative zones to take two Covid-19 tests over a three-day period from Tuesday. Local officials cited continued risks of the virus spreading outside known transmission chains, although reported locally transmitted infections fell to 17 cases on Sunday from a daily average of about 50 in the past week.</p> <p>Such stringent responses are emblematic of China's zero-tolerance policy toward the coronavirus, marked by extensive testing and heavy-handed lockdowns that have taken a hefty toll on the economy. Shanghai's lockdown from late March to the end of May coincided with an almost 14% drop in gross domestic product in one of China's most economically important cities.</p> <p>"Covid risks remain the most important determinant of China's growth outlook," Goldman Sachs analysts said in a note to clients dated Sunday, adding that the absence of a clear strategy to exit the zero-Covid policy creates risks to growth in the face of more transmissible variants.</p> <p>Across China, authorities detected 464 new locally transmitted cases on Sunday, down from 557 cases logged on Saturday, which marked the highest one-day tally since May 23, according to the latest data from the National Health Commission.</p>

	<p>Two hot-spot regions accounted for the bulk of Sunday's tally, reported Monday. Gansu, an impoverished landlocked province in northwestern China, recorded 202 new locally transmitted cases, up from 157 infections recorded Saturday. Guangxi, an autonomous region bordering Vietnam, reported 81 cases on Sunday, down from 241 the day before.</p> <p>The gambling enclave of Macau, meanwhile, extended a territory-wide lockdown over the weekend as it battled to contain its worst Covid-19 outbreak since the pandemic began.</p> <p>Casinos and many local businesses that have been shuttered since July 11 must remain closed through the end of Friday, after authorities said they were keeping containment measures in place for five more days. The former Portuguese colony started a new round of citywide Covid-19 testing for residents on Monday.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Calif. Covid hospitalizations quadrupled
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/california-covid-hospitalizations-have-quadrupled-who-is-getting-really-sick/
GIST	<p>COVID hospitalizations are rising again after more than two months of persistently high case rates in the Bay Area and California. But the doctors who treat these patients are seeing consistent indications that for most, the disease is less severe than in earlier surges of the deadly virus that has killed more than a million Americans.</p> <p>“What we are not seeing is patients like we saw in 2021 and 2020 — someone with no medical issues coming in and requiring oxygen,” said Dr. Errol Ozdalga, a clinical associate professor of medicine at Stanford.</p> <p>The increase has been much more gradual than during other COVID waves, likely due to widespread vaccination and booster coverage, and improved therapeutics and treatments which prevent some hospitalizations and shorten others. And the hospitalizations now are still well shy of the record 20,000-plus COVID patients in California hospitals during the first winter surge in 2020-21, and less than one-third of the 15,000 hospitalized this past winter.</p> <p>Still, the threat of serious illness and even death among some populations remains a real concern.</p> <p>Ozdalga and Dr. William Collins, another professor at Stanford's medical school, recently took a close look at the COVID patients that came through Stanford's hospital during the first omicron surge in December and January, and again more recently, to better understand how the threat posed by the virus has changed.</p> <p>“What you really want to know is how dangerous COVID is,” Ozdalga said.</p> <p>They found that of the nearly 100 patients hospitalized in recent weeks at Stanford who tested positive for COVID, 35% were being treated for severe disease caused by the virus, while the other patients were mainly being treated for non-COVID related issues. Some among the 35% were medically vulnerable patients who were admitted out of an abundance of caution after testing positive.</p> <p>UCSF hospitals reported a similar proportion among patients who are hospitalized because of the virus. As of Friday, they had 46 patients who tested positive for COVID, but 24 of those had been admitted for other medical reasons. In earlier COVID waves, in contrast, a much larger proportion of patients were admitted for treatment of severe disease, suggesting the virus was more threatening at that point than it is now.</p> <p>“The people we are seeing who have severe illness now are largely unvaccinated, including young people,” said Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, a UCSF professor of medicine who specializes in infectious diseases, “and those who are unboosted who are older than 65, and those who are immunocompromised.”</p>

The number of COVID patients in California hospitals has more than quadrupled in the past three months. As of Thursday, 4,432 patients had COVID, up from a low of 949 on April 16.

What affects your chances of being hospitalized for COVID? “Vaccination status is number one,” said Chin-Hong. “Age is number two.” And he’s especially concerned about people over 65 who are not fully boosted.

From what he is seeing at UCSF, Chin-Hong says the people getting hospitalized at this point “are mainly unvaccinated ... but among those hospitalized who are vaccinated, it’s the unboosted,” who are getting super sick.

Californians who are not fully vaccinated are 9.4 times more likely to be hospitalized for COVID, according to the most recent data available from the California Department of Public Health.

COVID hospitalizations have dipped below 1,000 for only a handful of days since reliable tracking began in April 2020. For a few days in late June 2021, and a few days in late April 2022, the number of patients in California was under 1,000.

The number of people in California hospitals who have tested positive for COVID is a metric the state has used since the first summer wave in 2020 to measure the real-world impacts and severity of the pandemic.

“The fact that people are still dying in America is really a tragedy,” said Chin-Hong, pointing to the availability of effective vaccinations, boosters and therapeutics, such as Paxlovid. “There are three alternatives for Paxlovid to help people stay away from the hospital.”

But as for how dangerous COVID is now for the average, vaccinated person? “I caught it in May and I was never once worried about getting hospitalized,” Ozdalgia said. “If I had gotten it last year I would have been really worried.”

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HEADLINE	07/17 Starbucks workers protest stores closures
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/starbucks-workers-protest-companys-decision-close-several-seattle-stores/DWOTYMZNNBBUVJAT75SGPWDA3A/
GIST	<p>Dozens of Starbucks workers gathered outside the Starbucks Roastery on Pike Street in Seattle on Sunday, protesting the company’s decision to close several Seattle stores at the end of the month.</p> <p>Those workers say the company is purposely trying to union bust.</p> <p>A Starbucks spokesperson reiterated to KIRO 7 that that is not the case, saying the company is “focused on investing in safe store experiences and empowering our local leaders to put safety first.”</p> <p>The company plans to close five Seattle locations at the end of the month due to safety concerns.</p> <p>But some employees of those stores worry about what’s next for them — especially those from the Olive Way location on Capitol Hill.</p> <p>They worry about their health benefits going away, particularly those in the LGBTQIA+ community.</p> <p>KIRO 7 also spoke with one barista from the roastery who says they have hip problems because of the shift they work.</p> <p>They also claim the company has refused to acknowledge that some shops have unionized and want them to vote on the matter again, a process they say has been extremely frustrating.</p>

"It has been months of waiting back and forth and now they are even refusing to acknowledge the fact that we have voted," said Alexander Ray Webster. "That's not right. We voted. We won the vote. We were supposed to start bargaining long ago and they are just refusing to acknowledge that."

This isn't the first protest against the company in recent days. [Workers protested outside the Olive Way location on Friday.](#)

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HEADLINE	07/16 King Co. mask mandate to return?
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/return-of-king-countys-mask-mandate-is-possible-as-covid-levels-are-on-the-rise
GIST	<p>If you thought mask mandates in King County were a thing of the past, think again.</p> <p>King County Public Health Officer Dr. Jeffrey Duchin says the county is seeing more cases per day than at the peak of the delta surge.</p> <p>He also says over the past week there have been 21 new COVID-19 hospitalizations per day, about one person hospitalized each hour.</p> <p>"We are in active discussions about if and when to consider re-issuing a mask mandate," Duchin said during a press briefing.</p> <p>With high transmission rates how and how fast variants like BA.4 and BA.5 are spreading Dr. Duchin is recommending people mask up indoors in public places, especially where there are large crowds.</p> <p>We stopped by Queen Anne Beer Hall to ask customers what they think of bringing back a mask mandate.</p> <p>"I think the masks are critical depending on where we are in the stage of COVID outbreak. If they think there's a threshold where they determine that, yeah, that's where we are, then I'm good with mask coming back," one person said.</p> <p>The owner of Queen Anne Beer Hall says he wants to leave that decision in the hands of the customers.</p> <p>"We feel it's the choice of the person. Everyone is really excited to get back to normal now and our guests are having a great time and we kind of feel it should be left up to them."</p> <p>Two years later, Dr. Duchin is reminding people that the fight against COVID-19 isn't over.</p> <p>"COVID-19 is not one and done, this is going to be a long-term challenge for us," he said.</p> <p>Now Dr. Duchin didn't give a specific timeline on the possibility of bringing back a mask mandate, but King County is one of several counties with high community levels.</p> <p>The CDC still feels it's best that if you live in an area with the high transmission you should wear a mask indoors and avoid indoor activities that aren't totally necessary if you're at high risk of severe illness.</p> <p>Also, improve ventilation indoors if possible.</p> <p>Meantime, the Biden administration has extended the COVID-19 public health emergency through mid-October.</p> <p>The emergency declaration has been in place since January 2020.</p> <p>BA.5 remains the most contagious and dominant strain of COVID-19.</p>

	For the first time in weeks, CDC ensemble forecasts are predicting a rise in hospitalizations over the next month.
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HEADLINE	07/17 Spokane firefighters using new fire map
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/wildfire/spokane-wildfire-map/293-b92b87d0-0ebf-4fc2-9e19-ec9158953088
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The Spokane Fire Department (SFD) is preparing for the upcoming wildfire season by using a new map that will show active and recent wildfires in the western United States.</p> <p>SFD hopes to use a map from the Western Fire Chiefs Association (WCFA) as a resource during wildfire season. Spokane Fire Chief Brian Schaeffer wants to use the map as a way to fight fires more efficiently and keep people safe.</p> <p>“This way, people can get a little more heads up on exactly what’s going on, where the fire permitter is, and where the fire is going so they can make better plans,” he said.</p> <p>The WCFA map uses real-time 911 dispatch call data from PulsePoint while another national service provides ongoing wildfire location and boundary data.</p> <p>Schaeffersaid this is the sort of project SFD has been waiting for since 2020.</p> <p>"This is a project the Western Fire Chiefs, which is inclusive of the city of Spokane, has been working on and, as an organizational priority, enables our community to be prepared and adaptive to wildland fire," he said.</p> <p>On the map, fire boundaries are shown in red, orange, and brown. The colors represent active fire burning from the past 12, 24, and 24 plus hours respectively.</p> <p>The map is also designed for cell phones and is built to load quickly. It allows the user to identify their location in relation to a wildfire. Shaeffer said other enhancements like fire weather and behavior predictions, alerts and evacuation routing will be coming soon.</p>
Return to Top	<i>The map is currently available to the public at no charge. If you want to access the map, you can do so here.</i>

HEADLINE	07/16 Spokane hotel to house Ukraine refugees
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/old-hotel-to-become-permanent-living-for-refugees/293-1d7bf784-cae2-4a7c-8164-ffb40884d852
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The Old Quality Inn by East Fourth Avenue is being transformed into the Thrive Center.</p> <p>The Thrive Center is meant to give Ukrainian refugees a permanent place to live. And the old hotel rooms in this building will eventually be transformed into an apartment complex.</p> <p>When Russia attacked Ukraine five months ago Spokane saw an influx of Ukrainian refugees. Many of them didn’t have a place to live.</p> <p>That’s when Thrive International jumped at the idea of turning a vacant hotel and making it a permanent home for them.</p> <p>Mark Finney, is the executive director of Thrive International. He said, “Well this is fantastic, there happened to be this hotel that was available. We talked to the owners, they bought it, looking to remodel it. It was empty but still totally usable. And they really liked the idea of working with Ukrainians and helping the refugee crisis.”</p>

Thrive International provides support and resources for Ukrainian refugees. This includes English classes and medical services.

One of the center's new residents says she's grateful for the support.

"I'm really happy to live here and I'm grateful everyday that I see very kind people around me because all Ukrainian refugees now need the support in this difficult time," said Maria Kukoba, a Thrive Center resident.

Saturday's celebration recognizes the Thrive Center as a community asset and as a refuge for Ukrainian families in need.

The center's designed to be temporary housing for families needing to get back on their feet.

Center staff say this wouldn't be possible without a partnership with fortify holdings, the owner of the building.

Sean Tylerkeys, the CEO of Fortify Holdings, said, "This pretty amazing in the sense that we are creating a refugee community within the community of Spokane. If that's not living out our mission, I don't know what is."

One floor of the building is already being renovated into apartment type rooms.

Thrive International not only focuses on the Thrive Center. They've also helped families settle in other housing.

"They did a lot for us. They helped us rent a flat," said Olay Kulabukhov, a Ukrainian refugee. "They helped us to find furniture for our flat. They helped with everything. With all this bedding stuff, kitchen stuff, with our kids."

A generous donation also helped residents live for free over the past two months.

While they will have to start paying after, rates will be lower than the city average.

So this process was in place since the Russian attack on Ukraine in February.

And people are already moving in to the hotel, and from what I've been told they're almost full.

But if people still want to move in they can fill out an online application with Thrive International.

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HEADLINE	07/17 France, Spain, Portugal trouble: heat, fires
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/france-spain-portugal-afflicted-heat-wildfires/story?id=86972928
GIST	<p>As Western Europe experiences a record-breaking heat wave, thousands of firefighters are having trouble containing forest fires in France, Spain and Portugal that have destroyed thousands of acres of land.</p> <p>The fires have forced thousands of people to evacuate to safety, as extreme heat grips the region. There have also been more than 1,000 heat-related deaths in Spain and Portugal so far in July, according to the respective countries' ministries of health.</p> <p>In southern France, more than 14,000 people were forced to flee as fires spread to more than 27,180 acres of land. The country's Interior Ministry also issued red alerts for heat waves for 15 French departments and orange alerts for 51 departments on Sunday.</p>

Monday could be the hottest day on record in the country, according to France's BFM TV. Belis, France, reached a high of 40.8 degrees Celsius -- 105.44 Fahrenheit -- on Sunday.

The number of people who died of heat-related deaths is unknown, but France's Ministry of Health told ABC News that information on the number of casualties will be released at the end of the month.

Meanwhile, more than 360 people in Spain have died from heat-related deaths between July 10 and 17, with 84 people dying in the last 24 hours, the country's Ministry of Health reported.

Firefighters there are fighting 30 active fires, mostly in Castilla y Leon, Galicia and Andalusia, Interior Ministry and Catalan Authorities said.

Temperatures on Sunday were forecast to reach 42 C (107.6 F) in three provinces in the country, prompting the state meteorological agency to issue "extreme risk" alerts.

In Mijas, Spain, in the municipality of Malaga, 3,000 people have fled due to fires. More than 22,000 acres of land are at risk of being burned in the Mijas province as firefighters struggle to contain the flames.

Wildfires are happening earlier in the season, ending later and becoming more frequent because of climate change, the European Union said in a report last year.

"Climate change is aggravating the situation, making countries more prone to wildfires and increasing the intensity of such events," the report said.

In Portugal, wildfires are quickly spreading throughout the country's central and northern regions. According to Portugal's Ministry of Health, between July 7 and 13, 238 people had heat-related deaths, and there were more than 421 heat-related fatalities between July 14 and 17.

The sweltering heat is also expected to take hold of other parts of Europe in the coming days. Areas of England are expected to hit 40 C (104 F) on Monday and Tuesday.

The U.K. government issued a national emergency and warned people not to leave their homes unless necessary, according to The Associated Press.

"This year, for the first time, we've issued a severe weather emergency response in summer," London Mayor Sadiq Khan said.

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HEADLINE	07/17 Sri Lanka acting president cites emergency
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/sri-lanka-acting-president-declares-emergency-amid-protests-86991395
GIST	<p>COLOMBO, Sri Lanka -- Sri Lanka's acting president on Monday declared a state of emergency giving him broad authority amid growing protests demanding his resignation two days before the country's lawmakers are set to elect a new president.</p> <p>Ranil Wickremesinghe became acting president on Friday after his predecessor, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, fled abroad on Wednesday and resigned after months-long mass protests over the country's economic collapse.</p> <p>Wickremesinghe's move to impose a state of emergency comes as protests demanding his resignation too have continued in most parts of the country, with some protesters burning his effigy.</p> <p>Lawmakers who met on Saturday began the process of electing a new leader to serve the rest of the term abandoned by Rajapaksa. Nominations for the election of the new president will be heard on Tuesday, and if there is more than one candidate the lawmakers will vote on Wednesday.</p>

The emergency decree issued by Wickremesinghe invokes sections of the Public Security Ordinance that allow him to make regulations in the interests of public security, the preservation of public order, the suppression of mutiny, riot or civil commotion, or for the maintenance of essential supplies.

Under the emergency regulations, Wickremesinghe can authorize detentions, take possession of any property and search any premises. He can also change or suspend any law.

The South Indian island nation is engulfed in an unprecedented economic crisis that has triggered political uncertainty.

Sri Lanka has run short of money to pay for imports of basic necessities such as food, fertilizer, medicine and fuel for its 22 million people. Its rapid economic decline has been all the more shocking because before the crisis the economy had been expanding, with a growing, comfortable middle class.

Sri Lanka is seeking help from the International Monetary Fund and other creditors, but top officials say its finances are so poor that even obtaining a bailout has proven difficult.

The economic hardships led to political upheaval and widespread protests demanding the government led by Rajapaksa step down. Although many ministers resigned in April, Rajapaksa had remained in power until last week.

The main protests have occurred in the capital, Colombo, where protesters occupied the front of the president's office for more than 100 days.

The protesters accuse Rajapaksa and his powerful political family of siphoning money from government coffers and of hastening the country's collapse by mismanaging the economy. The family has denied the corruption allegations, but Rajapaksa acknowledged that some of his policies contributed to Sri Lanka's meltdown.

Rajapaksa flew first to the Maldives on Wednesday and then to Singapore.

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HEADLINE	07/15 Tanzania deadly outbreak mystery disease
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/tanzania-investigates-deadly-outbreak-mystery-disease/story?id=86870310
GIST	<p>LONDON -- Health officials are investigating a deadly outbreak of a mystery disease in southern Tanzania that has infected over a dozen people and killed at least three of them.</p> <p>Tanzania's chief medical officer, Dr. Aifelo Sichalwe, urged the public to "remain calm" as he gave a briefing Wednesday from the capital, Dodoma. So far, a total of 13 cases of the unknown illness have been reported in Mbekenyeru village in the East African nation's Lindi region, with patients exhibiting symptoms similar to Ebola or Marburg virus diseases -- fever, headache, fatigue and bleeding, especially from the nose, according to Sichalwe.</p> <p>However, Sichalwe said preliminary results from laboratory testing has ruled out the Ebola and Marburg viruses in these cases, and that the patients had also tested negative for COVID-19.</p> <p>The first case was recorded at Mbekenyeru Health Center on July 5 and within three days, the hospital had received a second case, according to Sichalwe.</p> <p>While three of the 13 patients have since succumbed to the strange disease, two who were isolated at Mbekenyeru Health Center have recovered and returned home. Five patients remain in isolation, Sichalwe said.</p>

The Tanzanian Ministry of Health has dispatched a team of experts to Lindi region to investigate the outbreak and take measures to prevent further spread of the unknown illness, such as conducting contact tracing, identifying people with similar symptoms and isolating them. Anyone who has had contact with confirmed or suspected cases are being monitored for 21 days, according to Sichalwe, who advised anyone experiencing similar symptoms to seek medical attention immediately.

The Tanzanian health ministry did not immediately respond to ABC News' request for comment or additional information.

Dr. Fiona Braka, team lead for emergency responses at the World Health Organization's regional office for Africa, confirmed that "WHO teams in Tanzania are working closely with" teams from the Tanzanian health ministry (MoH) "to investigate the disease further and are monitoring the situation closely."

"The Tanzania MoH released a statement on Wednesday indicating that they have done an initial assessment and all investigations so far are negative for Ebola and Marburg," Braka told ABC News in a statement Friday. "WHO and MoH teams are working on getting further testing done to rule out other diseases, including conducting sequencing of the samples. Currently, there is no new information on the cause of this illness."

On Thursday, the WHO warned that Africa is facing a growing risk of outbreaks caused by zoonotic pathogens that originate in non-human animals and then switch species and infect humans. There has been a 63% increase in the number of zoonotic outbreaks in the region in the decade from 2012 to 2022, compared with 2001 to 2011, according to a new analysis by the United Nation's global health arm.

The analysis found that between 2001 and 2022, there were 1,843 substantiated public health events recorded in the WHO African region, of which 30% were zoonotic disease outbreaks. While these numbers have increased over the last two decades, the WHO noted, there was a particular spike in 2019 and 2020 when zoonotic pathogens represented around 50% of public health events. Ebola virus disease and other viral hemorrhagic fevers constitute nearly 70% of these outbreaks, while dengue fever, anthrax, plague, monkeypox and a range of other diseases make up the remaining 30%, according to the analysis.

"Infections originating in animals and then jumping to humans have been happening for centuries, but the risk of mass infections and deaths had been relatively limited in Africa. Poor transport infrastructure acted as a natural barrier," Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO's regional director for Africa, said in a statement Thursday. "However, with improved transportation in Africa, there is an increased threat of zoonotic pathogens traveling to large urban centers. We must act now to contain zoonotic diseases before they can cause widespread infections and stop Africa from becoming a hotspot for emerging infectious diseases."

The WHO warned that there can be a devastating number of cases and deaths when zoonotic disease arrive in cities, as several West African countries saw with the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak -- the largest and deadliest on record.

"We need all hands on deck to prevent and control zoonotic diseases such as Ebola, monkeypox and even other coronaviruses," Moeti added. "Zoonotic diseases are caused by spillover events from animals to humans. Only when we break down the walls between disciplines can we tackle all aspects of the response."

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HEADLINE	07/17 First responders killed in helicopter crash
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/sheriffs-helicopter-crashes-mexico-onboard/story?id=86957811
GIST	<p>Four people aboard a sheriff's department helicopter have died following a crash Saturday night near Las Vegas, New Mexico, according to the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Department.</p> <p>Three members of the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office and one member of the Bernalillo County Fire Department were in the helicopter known as Metro 2 at the time of the crash, officials said.</p>

	<p>The victims were identified by the sheriff's office as Undersheriff Larry Korn, Lt. Fred Beers, deputy Michael Levison and rescue specialist Matthew King.</p> <p>The first responders were on their way back to Albuquerque after assisting fire crews with the East Mesa Fire, according to the sheriff's department.</p> <p>New Mexico State Police said they had arrived at the scene, which is about 120 miles northeast of Albuquerque. Both the Federal Aviation Administration and National Transportation Safety Board were expected to investigate the crash, the state police said.</p> <p>"At this time the investigation into this incident is in its preliminary stages. As we learn further details, we will provide them through official press releases like this one," the sheriff's office said in a statement. "Please keep these individuals and their families in your thoughts and prayers tonight."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Iran claims nuclear bomb capability
SOURCE	https://www.ipost.com/middle-east-news/iran-news/article-712327
GIST	<p>Tehran is technically capable of making a nuclear bomb but has yet to decide whether to build it, a senior adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei told Al Jazeera's Arabic service on Sunday.</p> <p>Tehran will also directly respond against Israel should its security be targeted, the report says citing the advisor.</p> <p>"In a few days we were able to enrich uranium up to 60% and we can easily produce 90% enriched uranium ... Iran has the technical means to produce a nuclear bomb but there has been no decision by Iran to build one," Kamal Kharrazi said.</p> <p>Background</p> <p>In 2018, former US President Donald Trump ditched Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, under which Iran curbed its uranium enrichment work, a potential pathway to nuclear weapons, in exchange for relief from economic sanctions.</p> <p>About a year into Trump's "maximum pressure" policy on Iran, Tehran started violating the pact's nuclear restrictions.</p> <p>Iran has long denied seeking nuclear weapons, saying it is refining uranium only for civilian energy uses, and has said its breaches of the international deal are reversible if the United States lifts sanctions and rejoins the agreement.</p> <p>Indirect talks between Iran and President Joe Biden's administration, which aim to bring both Washington and Tehran back into compliance with the nuclear pact, have stalled since March.</p> <p>Kharrazi said Tehran would never negotiate over its missile program and regional policy, as demanded by the West and its allies in the Middle East.</p> <p>Just recently, the US-Israel agreement on the Jerusalem Declaration of the US-Israel Strategic Partnership includes a joint stance against Iran's nuclear program and regional aggression, stating they will utilize "all elements of national power" to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.</p> <p>Last Saturday, the US and Saudi Arabia agreed on the importance of stopping Iran from "acquiring a nuclear weapon," during a visit by US President Joe Biden, a joint statement carried by the Saudi state news agency (SPA) said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Ukraine military rebuffs Russia advances
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/17/europe/russia-ukraine-donetsk-battle-for-control-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>The Ukrainian military rebuffed Russian advances in Donetsk over the weekend, as the bloody battle for control in the eastern Donbas region grinds on.</p> <p>At least eight settlements in the eastern part of Donetsk came under fire Saturday through Sunday. Most of the settlements straddle a pocket of territory in the highway that leads west from Luhansk region towards the industrial cities of Donetsk, according to the Ukrainian military.</p> <p>“Ukrainian soldiers competently repelled another combat reconnaissance attempt near Berestove and Bilohorivka,” the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine said, adding that Russian forces were “firmly repulsed, suffered losses and withdrew.”</p> <p>While Russian forces fire at Ukrainian positions in Donetsk in preparation for the next stage of full-scale fighting in the war, the country’s defense ministry in Moscow on Saturday ordered commanders to take action to prevent Ukrainian strikes on Russian-held territory.</p> <p>“(Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu) gave the necessary instructions to further increase the actions of groups in all operational areas in order to exclude the possibility of the Kyiv regime to launch massive rocket and artillery strikes on civilian infrastructure and residents of settlements in Donbas and other regions,” the ministry said in a statement.</p> <p>Shoigu visited Russian forces involved in what the ministry has long described as the “special military operation in Ukraine,” the statement added.</p> <p>The order comes in response to a sharp rise in Ukrainian attacks far behind the front lines using recently acquired western howitzers and artillery.</p> <p>After Russian forces captured the last city in Luhansk region still in Ukrainian hands – Lysychansk – they have stepped up the bombardment of towns and cities in the neighboring Donetsk region.</p> <p>Ukrainian army resists Russian advances</p> <p>The Russian military has kept up a persistent barrage of artillery and missile strikes across the region for several weeks. The Kremlin says the goal of what it calls the “special military operation” is to take control of both Luhansk and Donetsk. About 45% of Donetsk – a region of heavy industry interspersed with farmland – is still held by the Ukrainians.</p> <p>But they are under pressure from three directions – east, north and south.</p> <p>Russian forces are also firing at Ukrainian positions south of the town of Bakhmut, according to the General Staff, including missile and air strikes, as well as artillery.</p> <p>Three missiles hit the Toretsk community but there was no information about casualties, according to Pavlo Kyrylenko, head of Donetsk region military administration. In the city of Kostiantynivka, the Russians had shelled the medical college, Kyrylenko added. He also urged civilians in the area to evacuate.</p> <p>For their part, the Russian armed forces have claimed “high-precision attacks” that “resulted in the elimination of 115th Mechanised Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) that had operated towards Siversk.”</p> <p>The area around Siversk has been heavily contested in the last two weeks, but Ukrainian forces appear to be holding out.</p>

Further north the city of Kharkiv has again been hit by missiles, Ukrainian officials say. Two missiles hit a five-storey industrial building and caught fire, Oleh Syniehubov, Head of Kharkiv region military administration said.

‘Russia is struggling’

As the war in Ukraine approaches five months and both armies suffer heavy losses, western officials say Ukraine “absolutely” believes it will regain territory from Russia and win the war.

“They are absolutely clear that they plan to restore the whole of their territory in terms of Ukraine, and they see a Russia that is struggling, a Russia that we assess has lost more than 30% of its land combat effectiveness,” UK Chief of the Defense Staff Admiral Tony Radakin [told the BBC](#) Sunday.

“What that actually means is 50,000 Russian soldiers that have either died or been injured in this conflict, nearly 1,700 Russian tanks destroyed, nearly 4,000 armored fighting vehicles that belong to Russia (were) destroyed.

“And what you’re seeing is a Russia, if we focus on the Donbas, that is less than 10% of the territory of Ukraine and we are approaching 150 days, and Russia is struggling to take that territory, and it is struggling because of the courage and determination of the Ukrainian armed forces.

“Russia started this invasion with the ambition to take the whole of Ukraine, Russia had the ambition to take the cities in the first 30 days, Russia had the ambition to create fractures and to apply pressure to NATO, this is Russia as a challenge to the world order, Russia is failing in all of those ambitions, Russia is a more diminished nation than it was at the beginning of February,” Radakin added.

The UK has been one of the strongest backers of President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian war effort.

But the Ukrainians are stretched along a vast front line from the Black Sea to the northeastern border with Russia – well over 1,000 kilometers in length. Despite a steady flow of western arms, Ukraine remains heavily outgunned by vast amounts of Russian artillery, missile batteries and mortars.

Very little ground has been won or lost this month – by either side – and western analysts see the conflict devolving into a tough war of attrition.

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HEADLINE	07/17 Russia strikes Ukraine south, presses east
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-strikes-south-ukraine-city-presses-attacks-east-86959238
GIST	<p>VINNYTSIA, Ukraine -- Russian missiles hit industrial facilities at a strategic city in southern Ukraine Sunday as a funeral was held for a 4-year-old girl killed in an earlier deadly strike elsewhere in the country.</p> <p>Liza, who had Down syndrome, was en route to see a speech therapist with her mother when a Russian missile struck the city of Vinnytsia in central Ukraine on Thursday. At least 24 people were killed, including Liza and two boys aged 7 and 8. More than 200 others were wounded, including Liza's mother, who remains in an intensive care unit in grave condition.</p> <p>"I didn't know Liza, but no person can go through this with calm," priest Vitalii Holoskevych said, bursting into tears as Liza's body lay in a coffin with flowers and teddy bears in the 18th century Transfiguration Cathedral in Vinnytsia.</p> <p>‘We know that evil cannot win,’ he said, his voice trembling.</p>

On Sunday, more Russian missiles struck industrial facilities in the strategic southern city of Mykolaiv, a key shipbuilding center in the estuary of the Southern Bug river. There was no immediate information about casualties.

Mykolaiv has faced regular Russian missile strikes in recent weeks as the Russians have sought to soften Ukrainian defenses.

The Russian military has declared a goal to cut off Ukraine's entire Black Sea coast all the way to the Romanian border. If successful, such an effort would deal a crushing blow to the Ukrainian economy and trade and allow Moscow to secure a land bridge to Moldova's separatist region of Transnistria, which hosts a Russian military base.

Early in the campaign, the Ukrainian forces fended off Russian attempts to capture Mykolaiv, which sits near the Black Sea Coast between Russia-occupied Crimea and the main Ukrainian port of Odesa.

Since then, the Russian troops have halted their attempts to advance in the city but have continued to pummel both Mykolaiv and Odesa with regular missile strikes.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Sunday that Russian missiles destroyed a depot for anti-ship Harpoon missiles delivered to Ukraine by NATO allies, a claim that couldn't be independently confirmed.

The Russians also sought to reinforce their positions in the Kherson region near Crimea and part of the northern Zaporizhzhia region that they seized in the opening stage of the conflict, fearing a Ukrainian counteroffensive.

The British Defense Ministry said Sunday that Russia is moving manpower and equipment between Kherson, Mariupol and Zaporizhzhia. It said the Russians also are increasing their security measures around Melitopol.

It added: "Given the pressures on Russian manpower, the reinforcement of the south whilst the fight for the Donbas continues indicates the seriousness with which Russian commanders view the threat."

For now, the Russian military has focused its efforts on trying to take control of Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland of Donbas, where the most capable and well-equipped Ukrainian forces are located.

Ukraine says its forces still retain control of two small villages in the Luhansk region, one of the two provinces that make up the Donbas, and are successfully fending off Russian attempts to advance deeper into the second one, the Donetsk region.

The Ukrainian military's General Staff said Sunday that Ukrainian troops thwarted Russian attempts to advance toward Sloviansk, the key Ukrainian stronghold in Donetsk, and other attacks elsewhere in the region.

During a visit to the front lines Saturday, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu issued an order "to further intensify the actions of units in all operational areas."

The Russian military said it has struck Ukrainian troops and artillery positions in Donbas in the latest series of strikes, including a U.S.-supplied HIMARS multiple rocket launcher. The Russian claims couldn't be independently verified.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, responded to Ukrainian officials' statements that Kyiv may strike the bridge linking Crimea and Russia, warning that that would trigger devastating consequences for the Ukrainian leadership."

“If that happens, the consequences will be obvious: They will momentarily face the Domsday,” Medvedev said Sunday. “It would be very hard for them to hide.”

While focusing on Donbas, the Russians hit areas all across the country with missile strikes.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Ukrainians not to fall for Russia’s attempts to scare them with warnings of horrendous missile attacks to come, which he said were aimed at dividing Ukrainian society.

“It’s clear that no Russian missiles or artillery will be able to break our unity or lead us away from our path” toward a democratic, independent Ukraine,” he said in his nightly video address to the nation. “And it is also clear that Ukrainian unity cannot be broken by lies or intimidation, fakes or conspiracy theories.”

In the Kharkiv region, at least three civilians were killed and three more were injured Saturday in a pre-dawn Russian strike on the city of Chuhuiv, which is only 120 kilometers (75 miles) from the Russian border, the police said.

Lyudmila Krekshina, who lives in the apartment building that was hit, said a husband and wife were killed, and also an elderly man who lived on the ground floor.

Another resident said she was lucky to have survived.

“I was going to run and hide in the bathroom. I didn’t make it and that’s what saved me,” said Valentina Bushuyeva. Pointing up at her destroyed apartment, she said: “There’s the bathroom — explosion. Kitchen — half a room. And I survived because I stayed put.”

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HEADLINE	07/17 Sudan’s tribal clashes death toll rises to 65
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/sudan-official-death-toll-tribal-clashes-65-86965409
GIST	<p>CAIRO -- The death toll from days of tribal clashes in a southern Sudanese province climbed to at least 65 people, a senior health official said Sunday.</p> <p>The fighting between the Hausa and Birta ethnic groups in the Blue Nile province also injured around 150 others, said Gamal Nasser al-Sayed, the province’s health minister.</p> <p>He told The Associated Press that most of the dead were young men who were shot or stabbed.</p> <p>Al-Sayed urged authorities in the capital of Khartoum to help airlift 15 seriously injured as hospitals in the Blue Nile lack advanced equipment and life-saving medicine.</p> <p>The fighting in the Blue Nile grew out of the killing of a farmer earlier last week and continued through Saturday, according to the local government.</p> <p>Authorities deployed the military and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces — or RSF — to bring stability to the region. They also imposed a nightly curfew and banned gatherings in the towns of Roseires and Damazin, where the clashes took place.</p> <p>Local media reported that thousands of people fled their homes since the clashes began last week.</p> <p>The fighting was the latest tribal violence to hit Sudan, which is in turmoil since the military took over in a coup in October.</p> <p>The coup upended the country’s short-lived transition to democracy after nearly three decades of repressive rule of autocrat Omar al-Bashir.</p> <p>Al-Bashir and his Islamist government were removed from power in a popular uprising in April 2019.</p>

HEADLINE	07/17 Spain brutal heat wave death toll tops 350
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/07/17/Spain-heat-death-toll350/7181658063083/
GIST	<p>The heat wave impacting Spain for several consecutive days has killed at least 360 people, according to La Vanguardia. On Friday alone, 123 deaths in the country were attributed to the record-breaking heat.</p> <p>Of the 360 deaths reported, the community of Madrid reported 22 deaths, while one 60-year-old municipal cleaning worker died Saturday during work.</p> <p>On July 10, the first day of the heat wave, 15 heat-related deaths were recorded. Since then, the number of daily deaths has increased every day. By Wednesday, daily deaths attributed to the heat rose to 60 as temperatures surpassed 40 degrees Celsius in parts of the country.</p> <p>Madrid-Barajas airport hit 108 degrees Fahrenheit on Thursday, which broke its record for the highest temperature ever recorded in the month of July. Spain reported 93 deaths attributed to the heat on Thursday.</p> <p>The heat has been baking Portugal and Spain with temperatures frequently topping 100 since Friday, July 8. Seville, Spain, has been one of the hottest spots with the mercury soaring at or above 105 for nine consecutive days.</p> <p>The temperature of 116.6 recorded in Pinhão, Portugal, on Thursday became the highest temperature ever recorded in the country in July. The country's current July record stands at 115.7, which was set in Amareleja in 1995.</p> <p>This heat wave is expected to expand across Europe through this week and potentially through the end of the month for some areas.</p> <p>"There is concern that this heat could become a long-duration heat wave (20 or more days) for many locations from Portugal to central France and interior southeastern Europe as it could last for the rest of July and continue into August," AccuWeather Senior Meteorologist Tyler Roys said. This includes the valleys of Hungary, eastern Croatia, eastern Bosnia, Serbia, southern Romania and northern Bulgaria.</p> <p>The severity of the heat could rival the 2003 heat wave when over 30,000 people lost their lives, both directly and indirectly, due to the heat, according to Roys. He added that this could be one of the worst heat waves in Europe since 1757.</p> <p>The source of the exceptionally warm air is Africa's Sahara Desert with heat projected to expand farther north and east each day, reaching Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom later this weekend.</p> <p>"July all-time records are at risk of being approached, tied or even broken across Ireland and the United Kingdom," Roys said. "This includes individual cities such as Birmingham, Dublin, Manchester and York."</p> <p>On Friday, the U.K. Met Office issued its first Red Extreme heat warning for Monday and Tuesday, when the "exceptional hot spell" is expected to take hold and bring "widespread impacts on people and infrastructure."</p> <p>Officials say that during this first-ever-used national heat wave emergency, "illness and death may occur among the fit and healthy - and not just in high-risk groups."</p> <p>A new all-time record high could be set in the U.K. during the peak of the unprecedented heat. The current record in the country is 102 F (38.7 C), which was set in Cambridge Botanica Garden on July 25, 2019.</p>

Londoners could experience temperatures approaching the century mark during the peak of the heat early in the week.

In [Paris](#), temperatures early this week could come within a degree or two of 104 F (40 C). When temperatures reached this territory during a heat wave in 2019, officials allowed Parisians to cool off in the Trocadero Fountain near the Eiffel Tower. This measure could be taken again in the coming days.

Riders and spectators of the [Tour de France](#) should also brace for the abnormally high temperatures as the tour weaves its way across southern France after leaving the Alps. Spectators lining the roads should take the proper precautions to avoid heat-related illness, especially when roads are closed for cyclists as the temporary closures could limit access to some healthcare facilities, experts say.

The extreme temperatures are making it even more challenging for the [thousands of firefighters working to slow down raging infernos](#) across Portugal, Spain and France.

On Friday, [the pilot of a firefighting aircraft died](#) when his plane crashed during a firefighting operation in northeastern Portugal, near the country's border with Spain, according to the Associated Press (AP).

As of Saturday, more than 12,000 people have been evacuated in southwestern France near the towns of [Landiras](#) and [La Teste-de-Buch](#) in the Gironde region due to an out-of-control forest fire, [Reuters](#) reported.

Temperatures more common for [Death Valley](#), California -- touted as one of the hottest places on Earth -- will be possible in eastern Portugal and western and southern Spain during the height of the hot spell. The AccuWeather Local Max&trade temp is 120 in Spain and Portugal. For comparison, temperatures typically top out near 118 in Death Valley in July.

People planning to travel to Europe for vacation through the end of July should prepare for the heat and be ready to change plans if events are canceled and buildings are closed due to the extreme weather.

"Tourist destinations across Portugal are being closed for the safety of the public and, in some cases, due to nearby fires," Roys said. More closures are possible across Portugal, Spain and France due to wildfires and heat.

Meteorologists say people should be mindful of wildfire activity, especially those with poor respiratory health, as the smoke from the wildfires could produce [poor air quality](#).

Adding further strain to residents and visitors amid the heat is that air conditioning is not used as widely in Europe as it is in the United States. Even where there are air conditioners, they may not cool down buildings as much as those in the U.S.

An initiative in Italy dubbed "operation thermostat" states that [air conditioners cannot be set lower than 27 C \(81 F\)](#) in an effort to conserve energy, according to Politico. Residents or businesses that do not comply with this new law could be fined roughly the equivalent of \$500 to \$3,000.

Unfortunately, Mother Nature will provide little of her own natural cooling during the overnight hours.

"Many places will not have temperatures drop off very much at night," AccuWeather Senior Meteorologist Tony Zartman said. "Elevated temperatures at night prevent the body from recovering from the stress of the daytime heat. Without this recovery, the risk for [heatstroke](#) becomes much greater."

The widespread heat wave is not predicted to let up anytime soon with temperatures remaining well above average through this week across much of Europe, though the northern half of the continent should cool down by the middle to the latter part of the week.

Long-term heat waves are uncommon in Europe, but they are not unheard of.

	<p>"Over the last 25 years, there have only been three long-duration heat waves to impact parts of Europe: 2003 (western and central Europe, 32 days), 2006 (western and north-central Europe, 35 days) and 2021 (Italy and southeast Europe, 21 days)," Roys explained. Last summer was also the hottest on record for Europe.</p> <p>The extended hot spell could also impact local economies, including agriculture.</p> <p>"The soil across Portugal to Germany is in the process of quickly losing whatever moisture it contained," Roys said. "This drying is not expected to let up but only intensify during the duration of the heat wave as little to no precipitation is expected across much of the region."</p> <p>The ramifications of this may not be fully realized until the autumn harvest.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Japan Covid cases surge past 100,000 daily
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/07/17/covid-19-japan-100000-cases-daily-near-record/8091658064726/
GIST	<p>July 17 (UPI) -- COVID-19 cases are spiking again in Japan with infections topping 100,000 for the first time since a record in February during the emergence of the Omicron subvariant.</p> <p>On Sunday, Japan reported 105,564 cases for a total of 10,335,243 in 13th place worldwide as the BA.5 Omicron subvariant spreads worldwide. Deaths rose by 17, bringing the total to 31,615 in 31st.</p> <p>In the first peak, cases hit 26,184 on Aug. 22, amid the Delta surge and two weeks after the close of the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, which were delayed one year because of the pandemic. The cases record is 105,816 on Feb. 6.</p> <p>Before the Delta surge, the record was 7,785 on Aug. 19, 2021. In 2020, the most was 3,717 on Dec. 31.</p> <p>Worldwide, in the past week, infections dropped 3% at 6,387,270 with a daily average of 873,525, the highest in three months, according to tracking by Worldometers.info. On Jan. 21, the daily record was set at 3,840,795. The total so far Sunday is 567,072,826, including 663,237 Saturday.</p> <p>Meanwhile, fatalities dropped 7% for a total of 10,987 in the past week. That daily average of 1,570 with the recent low 1,216 July 4, which is the lowest since 1,076 on March 21, 2020, 10 days after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. So far Sunday the total is 6,387,270, including 999 Saturday.</p> <p>Some nations do not report data on weekends.</p> <p>Japan had the fifth-most cases in the past week, 506,017 with a 110% rise.</p> <p>Other case increases in the past week with more than 25,000 in descending order were South Korea 108% with 229,980, Peru 110% with 71,818, Guatemala 44% with 37,815, Romania 348% with 34,582, Iran 187% with 25,126.</p> <p>The United States reported the most cases, 740,547 but an 8% drop, No. 2 France at 710,901 with a 21% decline, No. 3 Italy at 671,277 with a 1% gain, No. 4. Germany at 670,724 with a 7% rise.</p> <p>Among nations reporting more than 100 deaths with big increases in the past week: Italy 35% with 7844, third in world; Mexico 45% with 398; Thailand 25% with 199; Japan 47% with 156; South Korea at 68% with 104.</p>

Like in cases, the United States reported the most deaths, 1,893 but a 20% drop. Brazil was second with 1,799 with an 11% rise. Germany was fourth with 671 and an 18% gain.

Posting weekly cases increases were Asia 22% for 164,424,027, Oceania 5% for 10,609,135, South America 3% for 61,132,255. Declines were Africa 31% for 12,442,577, Europe 14% for a world-high 210,683,449, North America 3% for 108,080,712.

Gains in deaths were: Oceania 19% for 15,182 and South America 7% for 1,310,697. Drops were Africa 26% for 256,414, North America 15% for 1,496,776, Europe 11% for a world-high 1,864,932, Asia 3% for 1,443,254.

The U.S. leads with 1,048,822 fatalities and 91,250,392 infections, according to Worldometers.info. The U.S. holds the world record for daily cases at 909,017 on Jan. 13. Brazil is second in deaths at 675,353 and third in cases at 33,290,266. India is second in cases at 43,750,599, including 20,528 Sunday, the most since 22,271 Feb. 18.

India has the daily deaths record at 4,529 on May 18, 2021, with no adjustments from regions.

Russia is fourth in deaths at 381,811, including 46 Sunday and 39 on July 10, the least since 34 April 16, 2020, with France fourth in cases with 32,942,910.

In the top 10 for deaths, Mexico is fifth with 326,491, Peru sixth with 213,301, Britain seventh with 181,580, Italy eighth with 169,846, Indonesia ninth with 156,849, France 10th with 150,576.

In the top 10 for cases, Germany is fifth with 29,692,989, British sixth with 23,075,360, Italy seventh with 20,076,863, South Korea eighth with 18,761,757, Russia ninth with 18,490,296, Turk 10th with 15,297,539.

In all, more than 12 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered worldwide, a gain of more than 200 million in two weeks, with the world's population of 7.9 billion, according to Bloomberg tracking.

Broken down by world regions, Asia-Pacific has administered at least one dose to 80% of the population, with United States and Canada at 79%, the same as Latin America and Asia-Pacific with Europe at 69%, Middle East 57% and Africa at 24%, according to The New York Times tracking.

Japan is promoting a fourth shot to combat the spike in cases during the seventh wave.

Also, Japan is boosting free-of-charge coronavirus testing capacity at railway stations and airports, and making sure that effective ventilation is provided inside buildings.

"We are not considering movement restrictions at this juncture," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a meeting of the government's coronavirus task force Friday. "We'll stay on maximum alert and work for the recovery of social and economic activities."

These efforts mean Japan will "conduct a careful transition to normal while pursuing coexistence with the virus," Kishida said.

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HEADLINE	07/17 Drivers' frustration: surge in car-fire recalls
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/recent-surge-in-car-fire-recalls-frustrates-drivers-11658059380?cx_testId=3&cx_testVariant=cx_2&cx_artPos=5&mod=WTRN#cxrecs_s
GIST	Sean Nemeth, the owner of a plug-in hybrid Chrysler Pacifica, was perplexed when earlier this year he received a rather surprising recall notice , advising him to park his vehicle outside and away from structures.

The notice informed him that his particular model is at risk of catching fire—even while stationary and turned off—and the cause is still unknown.

“What am I supposed to do with it then?” said Mr. Nemeth, recalling his reaction at the time. He eventually decided to park it across the street from his house in a low-traffic cul-de-sac.

His predicament has become more commonplace in recent years with the [expansion of electric-vehicle sales](#) and more car companies confronting incidents of parked cars suddenly bursting into flames, including those involving more-traditional gas-engine models such as the Ford Expedition.

As a precaution, auto makers are issuing “park outside” orders that instruct drivers to park in the open air and away from houses and structures that could be potentially damaged if a fire were to occur. In many cases, the remedy isn’t immediately available, leaving drivers to figure out what to do with the vehicle in the interim—sometimes for months.

At least 31 recall campaigns covering 3.3 million vehicles have been launched with park-outside orders in the past decade, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The majority of those—18 campaigns, or about 60%—occurred within the past two years, NHTSA’s data show.

“It’s unusual to see several ‘park outside’ recalls in a row,” said William Wallace, associate director of safety policy at the nonprofit advocacy organization Consumer Reports. “But if there’s a fire risk, this is exactly the kind of guidance that people should get until a fix is available.”

The [rise in these incidents](#) is in part caused by problems that have emerged with some new batteries as the auto industry’s reliance on a still-maturing supply for the technology has grown, according to vehicle-safety advocates.

Car companies are trying to get ahead of fire risks in a different way, and auto-safety regulators are pushing the industry to take more precautions when these fire incidents are discovered, according to the advocates.

Chrysler recalled the Pacifica plug-in hybrid minivan after receiving a dozen fire incident reports, including some in which fires started while the vehicles were turned off. The recall covers nearly 17,000 plug-in hybrid Pacifica minivans, between the 2017 and 2018 model years.

Along with parking the vehicle outside, the company has also advised drivers to avoid recharging the minivan’s battery and operate the vehicle on gasoline only.

A spokesman for [Stellantis](#) NV, the owner of Chrysler, declined to comment on specific customer cases such as Mr. Nemeth’s. He said that while the company’s advisory might pose an inconvenience, it is done in the interests of safety, and that the auto maker has reimbursed some customers for rental cars. Stellantis said it is still investigating the cause.

Mr. Nemeth, who lives in California, said he has received an \$85 a day reimbursement from Stellantis to rent a vehicle, but it is tough to find a battery-powered one at that rate. He has been waiting months for a fix and is frustrated because he can’t use the minivan’s battery at a time of high gasoline prices.

Courtney Fong, an Illinois resident, has had to deal with park-outside orders on two vehicles he has owned: the Pacifica plug-in minivan and the all-electric Chevrolet Bolt, which was first recalled by [General Motors](#) Co. in 2020 after receiving [reports of several battery fires](#).

GM has since remedied the problem, blaming it on a defect in some battery cells, and [began replacing batteries](#) in recalled Bolts. Some owners said the problem was vexing because they were also told not to fully charge their all-electric vehicles. Some parking facilities banned drivers from parking Chevy Bolts in their structures.

“Extended trips were impossible,” Mr. Fong said, regarding the limited charging range. He said he got rid of the Bolt because of [these hassles](#).

A GM spokesman said that safety is a priority and that it issues the recall recommendations to do the right thing for the customer. The spokesman declined to comment on specific customer incidents.

Now Mr. Fong is facing a similar problem with the Pacifica plug-in hybrid, which his family purchased in part because it could drive the vehicle for short trips around town on electricity only. He has avoided charging because of the recall, requiring him to rely solely on gas.

Parking, too, has been at times difficult. At home, there is room in his driveway, he said, but he has to make accommodations in public settings. At a recent sporting event, he parked the Pacifica on the roof to be safe. “People can live with that for a short period of time,” he said. “But it’s been several months.”

Other drivers are puzzled over what to do when at home.

Rick Rezko, who also lives in Illinois, in May got a notice for his Ford Expedition, indicating that the vehicle is being recalled for a fire risk and that owners should park it in an isolated area.

[Ford Motor](#) Co. said it [initiated the recall](#), which also includes certain model year Lincoln Navigators, after learning of 16 incidents in which a fire originated under the hood, including some cases where the vehicles were parked and the ignition was off.

Mr. Rezko is trying to take precautions, but he said that he has limited options for on-street parking and that his driveway is a tight squeeze. Right now, the Expedition is parked there, as far away from the other car as possible, but the family still feels on edge, he said.

“It’s very concerning,” Mr. Rezko said. “There aren’t a lot of practical places, lawful places, to park this hazard.” Mr. Rezko is a plaintiff in a lawsuit seeking class-action status that alleges Ford should have known about the fire risk before launching the SUVs and took too long to warn customers. Ford said it doesn’t comment on pending litigation.

If customers have a unique circumstance that makes them unable to abide by the advisory, they should contact their dealer and might be eligible for a rental car at no cost, a Ford spokesman said.

Earlier this month, Ford said it had identified the safety problem, attributing it to printed circuit boards that are uniquely susceptible to a high-current short and the risk of catching fire. The auto maker expanded the scope of the May recall to include about 27,000 more Expeditions and Navigators, adding that it expects parts for the repair to be available in September.

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HEADLINE	07/15 CDC warns parechovirus spreading
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Health_News/2022/07/15/CDC-virus-infecting-babies/1491657903406/
GIST	<p>A virus dangerous to infants is spreading across the United States, and parents and pediatricians should be on the lookout for symptoms, federal health officials say.</p> <p>Parechovirus has caused at least one infant death and has cropped up in multiple states since May, according to a health advisory issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Human parechoviruses are common childhood pathogens that are transmitted via respiratory droplet or by the fecal-oral route, the CDC says.</p>

Symptoms like upper respiratory tract infection, fever and rash are common in children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years. Most children have been infected by parechoviruses by the time they start kindergarten.

But the viruses can cause severe illness in babies younger than 3 months, including [sepsis](#), [seizures](#), [meningitis](#) and [meningoencephalitis](#), the CDC said. This is of particular risk in infants younger than 1 month.

In its alert, the CDC warned doctors that these viruses circulate in the summer and fall, and that they should be considered as a potential infection in an infant with fever, sepsis or neurological symptoms.

A Connecticut baby died in June after contracting the virus when he was 8 days old, according to [CT Insider](#). His first symptoms were a rash on his cheeks and a red chest, but then he became less active, stopped crying and suffered seizures.

Ronan Delancy only lived 34 days, according to his mother Katherine Delancy. Before he died, the virus had attacked and destroyed the white matter in much of his brain.

"They checked him for epilepsy and certain seizure disorders," she told CT Insider. "They also were looking to see if he maybe had a head injury of some sort."

Doctors tried everything during Ronan's hospitalization.

"They tried different seizure medications, and none of them were controlling the seizures, and they were getting worse," she said.

Because there is no routine surveillance for parechoviruses in the United States, it's not clear how the number of cases reported this year compares to previous years, the CDC said.

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More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [parechoviruses](#).

HEADLINE	07/16 Russia steps up military recruitment
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/07/16/steps-up-military-recruitment-troops-further-intensify-war-ukraine/3481657996782/
GIST	<p>July 16 (UPI) -- Russia is stepping up its military recruitment, which could come at a steep cost to the country well into the future, experts said Saturday as Russia's defense minister directed troops to "further intensify" the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>The Institute for the Study of War, a think tank based in Washington, D.C., said in an analysis Saturday that Russia "has launched a large-scale drive to form volunteer battalions" from across the country with "new volunteer units being reported daily."</p> <p>The new battalions are expected to each consist of around 400 men between the ages 18 and 60, who will be assigned to various jobs including motorized rifle units, tanks and naval infantry units, according to the think tank.</p> <p>"Recruits are not required to have prior military service and will undergo only 30 days of training before deployment to Ukraine," the think tank wrote in its analysis.</p> <p>"This drive will likely produce 'soldiers' of lower quality than the normal conscripts in the Russian army at close to professional-soldier prices."</p> <p>The think tank noted that the recruitment effort "will likely be expensive" and that the salaries for new recruits generally start at around \$3,000 per month per soldier, or about \$1.2 million per month per 400-man unit.</p>

"If the effort generates 85 battalions each of 400 men it would bring an additional 34,000 volunteers into the fight at the cost of about \$102 million per month in salary alone," the think tank wrote.

"Considering that the 30 days of training the volunteers will receive before entering combat will not produce combat-ready soldiers, that price is very high."

The recruits will likely receive veteran status and benefits for serving in Ukraine which will add to Russia's budget "for decades," according to the think tank.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei K. Shoigu has directed troops to "further intensify" war efforts in Ukraine, The New York Times reported, citing a statement from the Defense Ministry.

Meanwhile, the Russian Defense Ministry alleged in a statement to Telegram on Saturday that "Ukrainian nationalists refuse to be involved in operations in Donbas" and have abandoned their positions near Artyomovsk.

The Donbas region, which comprises the provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk, has been largely held by pro-Russian separatists since Crimea was annexed by Russia in 2014. Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized Luhansk and Donetsk as independent republics before the start of the invasion on Feb. 24.

Experts have said Putin will try to annex the Donbas region into Russia in the coming months.

The British Defense Ministry, which has been providing intelligence updates throughout the war, said Saturday that Russian offensive operations "remain reduced in scope and scale, with fighting west of Lysychansk focused on Siversk and Bakhmut."

The British officials said that Russia's efforts remain reduced despite Russian claims to have entered the outskirts of the town of Siversk earlier in the week.

"Russia has previously made premature and false claims of success. This is likely at least in part aimed at demonstrating success to domestic audiences and to reinforce the morale of the fighting forces," the British Defense Ministry said.

"Ukrainian defense has been successful in repulsing Russian attacks since Lysychansk was ceded and the Ukrainian defensive line was shortened and straightened."

The British Defense Ministry said that Ukraine's strategic withdrawal from Lysychansk on July 3, the last Ukrainian stronghold in the Luhansk province, has allowed Ukraine to concentrate its forces and "has been instrumental in reducing Russia's momentum."

Still, missile strikes were reported in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk causing air alerts to be raised across most of Ukraine on Saturday.

Oleh Synehubov, the governor of the Kharkiv province, said in a statement to Telegram that a 70-year-old woman and two men in their 60s were killed during a rocket attack on the city of Chuhuiv in the Kharkiv region.

Three other people were hospitalized for their injuries, Synehubov said -- adding that a residential building and a school were among the structures destroyed and damaged. Russian forces also shelled Kharkiv and Izium but there were no casualties reported.

Valentyn Reznichenko, the governor of the Dnipropetrovsk province, said in a statement on Telegram that 53 rockets were fired on the city of Nikopol on Saturday, killing at least two people.

	<p>A senior military official in the United States said during a press briefing on Friday that between 100 and 150 civilians have been killed by Russian military strikes in Ukraine.</p> <p>"We assess that Russian forces are limited to incremental, if any, gains around the northern Donbas, held off by Ukrainian defenses," the senior official said.</p> <p>"Russian forces continue to deploy indiscriminate artillery bombardment, along with air missile strikes."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Putin seeks stronger ties with Iran, Turkey
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-seeks-to-cement-ties-with-iran-turkey-in-rare-trip-abroad-11658055769?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin is set to travel to the Middle East this week, a rare trip abroad intended to signal that the protracted and costly war in Ukraine hasn't diminished Moscow's place on the world stage.</p> <p>In only his second trip outside Russia since the country invaded Ukraine in February, Mr. Putin is set to travel to Tehran on Tuesday, where he will meet Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. The visit reflects the importance Mr. Putin places in maintaining the leverage Russia gained from years of military and diplomatic intervention in the Middle East.</p> <p>Mr. Putin's trip comes just days after President Biden's own tour of the Middle East, where he sought to rally Israel and Arab countries to counter Russia, China and Iran, whose influence has grown while the U.S. has scaled back its presence in the region.</p> <p>"In light of the invasion of Ukraine, isolation from the West, sanctions, maintaining that influence if not expanding it is becoming even more important for Russian foreign policy," said Hanna Notte, a senior research associate at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation.</p> <p>Russia is "realizing there's no future with the West. This is irreversibly gone," she added. "Its future will have to lie with the global south."</p> <p>Mr. Putin is seeking to cement Russia's relationship with Iran, an American foe that, like Russia, is the target of crippling U.S. sanctions and has become a key military and trading partner to Moscow. In June and July, Russian officials visited Iran to review the country's attack-capable drones, according to U.S. intelligence, which believes Iran is set to provide them to Russia for the Ukraine war.</p> <p>The Russian president's meeting with Mr. Erdogan is set to come as Turkey has succeeded in carving out a critical role of arbiter in the war. Turkey, a NATO member that before the war clashed with the U.S. over Mr. Erdogan's on-and-off diplomatic flirtation with Moscow, condemned the Russian invasion and has sold armed drones to Ukraine, but hasn't imposed sanctions on the Kremlin.</p> <p>Despite a sometimes-tense relationship with Mr. Putin, Mr. Erdogan is playing arbiter for a possible plan to create a corridor for grain trapped in Ukraine, as well as eventual peace talks.</p> <p>"The direction of the president's visits abroad speaks to where he now sees the need and opportunity for Russian diplomacy," said Dmitry Trenin, a Russian pro-Kremlin foreign-policy analyst.</p> <p>The three leaders are set to discuss Syria, where Russia and Iran back the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. Turkey supports opposing rebel groups.</p> <p>Russia intervened militarily in the civil war in Syria in 2015, using air power to turn the tide of the conflict and help preserve the Assad regime. In Tehran, Mr. Putin will emphasize to his Turkish and Iranian counterparts that Moscow remains a key player in Syria despite the campaign in Ukraine, said Fyodor Lukyanov, chairman of a Kremlin advisory board on foreign and defense policy.</p>

Despite devoting more than 100,000 soldiers to the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has managed to maintain its military footprint in Syria and Libya, two countries where Moscow used relatively low-cost armed interventions to develop outsize influence in the region.

In recent weeks, Russia has [intensified some of its military operations](#) in Syria, launching airstrikes near U.S. bases and harassing American forces deployed in the country, U.S. officials have said.

Last week, Russia used its veto power at the United Nations Security Council to force a reduction in the U.N. mandate [to deliver food aid](#) to millions of Syrians, putting strain on a Western-backed relief operation in rebel-held areas of Syria.

Mr. Putin met with Mr. Raisi in Moscow in January and again last month in Turkmenistan on the sidelines of a regional summit.

“He’s putting a lot of effort into this relationship,” said Mark N. Katz, a professor of government and politics at George Mason University and a specialist on Russia’s relations in the Middle East.

Russia is dangling the prospect of grain deliveries to Iran, whose population has been hit hard by food-price inflation, in exchange for Tehran’s help in circumventing sanctions, say Iranian businessmen and officials.

In May, Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji said Tehran had finalized an agreement for the supply of 5 million tons of wheat and grain following a meeting with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak. Mr. Novak has confirmed that Russia discussed trade deals with Iran but not whether any were signed.

Russians are now flocking to the Islamic Republic, often to discuss ways to circumvent sanctions, say Iranian businessmen. Deals on the table include Iran selling to Russian buyers clothing to replace Western brands and automotive spare parts to embattled Russian car makers. There have also been discussions of an export corridor running from Russia to India through Iran.

During his May trip in Tehran, Russia’s Mr. Novak said trade between the two countries had risen by 80% year-over-year to \$4 billion in 2021. He expected it to rise to \$40 billion in the near future.

Mr. Putin’s visit—his second foreign trip since the war following a visit to Central Asia—might also assuage recent friction with Tehran, which has seen Russian oil traders aggressively undercut Iranian counterparts in sales to China and other Asian buyers.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has alleged Iran was preparing to [provide Russia with drones](#) for the battlefield in Ukraine, as well as training for its forces to use them. Tehran subsequently reassured Kyiv it wouldn’t supply drones to Russia.

Despite Western sanctions, Russia has maintained relatively warm relations with a range of Middle East countries, including traditional U.S. security partners like Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Putin has cultivated personal relations with the leaders of those countries, offering a partnership that comes free of Western criticism of government abuses of human rights.

Since the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has also threatened to use grain and other key food products to reward allies. Last month, Russian Agriculture Minister Dmitry Patrushev said Moscow would limit grain exports to “countries that are friendly to us.”

That could give [Russia leverage over countries](#) like Egypt, the world’s largest importer of wheat, which gets more than 70% of its wheat supplies from Ukraine and Russia. Turkey obtains over 80% of its supplies from the two nations.

	<p>Much is at stake in Mr. Putin's meeting with Turkey's Mr. Erdogan, with the two leaders expected to discuss a U.N.-backed proposal to resume exports of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea, Turkish involvement in the war in Ukraine and recent Turkish threats to launch a new military incursion in Syria.</p> <p>Russian, Ukrainian and Turkish negotiators reached an agreement on the broad outlines of a deal to export grain on ships via the Black Sea on Wednesday, raising hopes of freeing some of the 20 million tons of grain and other agricultural products trapped in Ukraine.</p> <p>The deal now depends largely on Mr. Putin's approval. U.N. and Western officials have also said technical details of the plan are still to be negotiated.</p> <p>Mr. Erdogan is also expected to use the meeting to push for a new Turkish military operation against Kurdish militants in northern Syria, which would likely require Russian acquiescence due to the presence of Russian troops in the area.</p> <p>Mr. Erdogan has sought to position himself as a mediator in the crisis, with Turkey hosting two rounds of unsuccessful peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine.</p> <p>"Turkey is probably the only country that Russia is ready to look at as a mediator in this conflict," said Mr. Lukyanov of the Kremlin advisory body. "There are currently no grounds for peace talks, but at some point there will be."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Economic war attrition toll on Russia, West
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/economic-war-of-attrition-takes-toll-on-russia-west-11658050201?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>Beyond Moscow's military campaign is an economic war between Russia, on one side, and the U.S. and Europe on the other. That conflict is becoming a test of who can endure the most strife.</p> <p>So far, Russia appears to be suffering more, analysts say, with its economy set to contract sharply this year, the cost of living soaring and hundreds of businesses, from McDonald's Corp. to French car maker Renault SA, fleeing.</p> <p>But the U.S. and Europe are also incurring severe costs, mainly through higher energy prices that are likely to rise this winter, analysts say. Joblessness is expected to mount, too, as central banks respond to those inflation pressures by raising interest rates.</p> <p>The coming months will prove crucial in determining who gains leverage in this economic war, analysts say, with Russia struggling to find imports for its military and economy, and Western nations maneuvering to replace Russian energy.</p> <p>The war will cost roughly \$1 trillion in global output this year, according to a recent report from the Economist Intelligence Unit, a U.K.-based research group. The global economy is now projected to grow 2.8% instead of its prewar forecast of 3.9%, with the biggest losses in output suffered by Italy, Germany and France, the EIU says.</p> <p>Russia is "testing the West and the West is responding in kind," said Tymofiy Mylovanov, a University of Pittsburgh associate professor of economics and former Ukrainian government official. "It's a war of attrition—not only for Ukraine and Russia in the war theater, but for the moral resolve of Russia and the West," he said.</p> <p>This is a closer outcome than what many expected at the outset, when almost all the economic firepower was trained on Russia.</p>

The U.S. and its allies hit Russia with [sanctions unprecedented in scope](#); restrictions on transactions with its central bank, travel, trade and foreign investment, among other measures. The aim, a U.S. official said at the time, was to “deliver overwhelming costs to Russia” while avoiding “unwanted spillovers back to the U.S. or the global economy.”

In April, Russia’s central bank projected the country’s gross domestic product would fall 8% to 10% this year; its governor has since said the contraction will likely be smaller, citing more recent data, though she didn’t give a figure.

The Institute of International Finance, a Washington-based trade group, projects [Russia’s output will fall 15%](#) for the year as a whole from 2021. [JPMorgan Chase](#) & Co. forecasts a much lower but still drastic 3.5% drop. In either scenario, Russia’s contraction would be more severe than the 3.1% decline in global output in 2020, the first full year of the pandemic, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Russia’s official inflation rate soared to 15.9% in June—far higher than in the U.S. and Europe—government figures show. Analysts anticipate that unemployment will rise later this year.

“Russia is definitely feeling the pinch here—especially [the Russian middle class](#) who are used to being able to do all kinds of stuff they can’t do now,” said Claus Vistesen, chief eurozone economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, a U.K.-based economic-research consulting firm.

But the war is also exacting a toll on the West, analysts say. Trade disruptions caused by the sanctions, combined with investor fears of an eventual shortage of energy, [have pushed up prices for oil](#), natural gas and other commodities.

That has helped drive inflation to multidecade highs, leading central banks of the U.S., Australia, Canada and the U.K. to raise interest rates and the European Central Bank [to prepare to do so](#). Not all this is war-related. Even excluding food and energy, inflation is high, [especially in the U.S.](#), which is less exposed to higher natural-gas prices than Europe. Barclays PLC analysts expect the eurozone to slip into recession in the fourth quarter of this year.

That outlook could slip further if the energy crisis deepens. If Russian gas supplies are shut off completely, Germany’s output would likely fall 5% this year compared with current projections, [according to the Bundesbank](#), Germany’s central bank.

A senior Biden administration official said that the sanctions are having the desired effect and that the White House believes it is winning the economic war. As Russia’s economy deteriorates, President [Vladimir Putin](#) will face growing pressure to shift course, the official said.

Still, Russia seems to have outperformed President Biden’s own expectations. In late March, Mr. Biden said on Twitter that “the ruble was almost immediately reduced to rubble. The Russian economy is on track to be cut in half.”

The ruble did initially tumble but [has recovered](#)—thanks to interest-rate increases by Russia’s central bank, capital controls, growing exports and reduced imports. The most pessimistic projections don’t see Russia’s output contracting as much as Mr. Biden suggested.

The sanctions in some ways have hurt the countries that imposed them and helped Russia. Though Russia is exporting fewer barrels of oil, a higher price for a barrel means the country is expected to rake in more revenue than initially budgeted, according to a recent research note from JPMorgan analysts.

High inflation [is contributing to political strife](#) in the West. Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi tendered his resignation last week because of differences over [how to respond to the war](#) in Ukraine. French President Emmanuel Macron lost [his parliamentary majority](#) in an election driven by voters’ concerns about the rising cost of living. U.K. Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#) resigned this month under pressure from

	<p>Conservative Party lawmakers who worried scandals would impede the government's ability to respond to inflation.</p> <p>European plans to embargo Russian oil later this year could send energy prices up even more sharply and push the U.S. and Europe into recession, JPMorgan said. That is one reason U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has pushed to cap the price on Russian oil.</p> <p>"I think what we want to do is keep Russian oil flowing into the market to hold down global prices and try to avoid a spike that causes a world-wide recession and drives up oil prices," Ms. Yellen said in June. "But absolutely, the objective is to limit the revenue going to Russia," she added.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Inflation outpaces wage growth, spending
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/inflation-has-outpaced-wage-growth-now-its-cutting-into-spending-11658050200?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>Early in the Covid-19 pandemic, U.S. wage growth accelerated, as weekly earnings jumped more than 7% in April and May of 2020 compared with the same months a year earlier.</p> <p>The gain got a boost from low inflation and fewer expenses, bolstering the finances of Americans who kept their jobs.</p> <p>Over the past year, wage increases have continued to exceed prepandemic levels, with year-over-year growth topping 4% each month.</p> <p>But those steady gains have been wiped out by high prices. When taking inflation into account, there hasn't been a single month with year-over-year earnings growth since March 2021.</p> <p>Spending also rose over the past year, and like with wages, it was outpaced by inflation. Americans are spending more because of high prices, but adjusted for inflation, they are actually consuming less.</p> <p>Gas prices—one of the biggest and most visible areas of inflation—rose 60%, while sales at gas stations are up 50%, a gap that suggests Americans are reining in travel. The Federal Highway Administration showed a 1% increase in miles traveled in May from a year earlier, a number that has plateaued in recent months below 2019 levels.</p> <p>The notable exception to spending is in restaurants, where sales in June were up almost 14%. Prices rose less than 8%.</p> <p>After spending at bars and restaurants was cut roughly in half early in the pandemic, demand has surged back to the prerecession trend.</p> <p>Meanwhile, high inflation means that grocery-store spending, which dipped after early Covid-19 closures passed, has been rising faster than before the pandemic.</p> <p>All this means that despite higher pay and increased spending, the amount Americans are actually consuming has leveled off. Monthly retail sales are up 30% from prepandemic levels. When using inflation-adjusted dollars, that increase has hovered around 15% since early 2021.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Hungary tax change protests continue
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/17/hungary-protests-continue-for-fifth-day-amid-growing-anger-at-orban-tax-changes
GIST	Thousands of people protested in Budapest on Saturday for a fifth day against Viktor Orbán's government as anger deepens over tax changes that critics say will hurt small businesses.

Hungarians have taken to the streets since the parliament approved a law change on Tuesday that will affect hundreds of thousands of small-sized business owners.

The protests are the first since Orbán, the prime minister, won a consecutive fourth term by a landslide in April.

Several thousand people marched through downtown Budapest on Saturday chanting “Orbán get lost”.

“It’s crazy what they [the government] have done,” one protester, 37-year-old lawyer Ilona Pusztai, said. “This will not lead to more income for the budget.”

Another protester, Zoltan Gemesi, a 68-year-old teacher, said: “The government is currently planning such austerity measures [but] people cannot tolerate them any more.”

Addressing the rally, Peter Marki-Zay, who headed a united opposition but lost against Orbán in April, said the nationalist premier’s campaign promises had been “proven to be lies”.

In his regular radio address on Friday, Orbán defended the tax law change as “good and necessary”.

Despite price caps on essentials, the central European country faces soaring inflation and a plunging local currency amid talks with Brussels over held-up European Union funding.

Hungary, which largely depends on Russian oil and gas, declared a “state of danger” on Wednesday over the energy crisis sparked by the war in Ukraine.

Among the measures to tackle the problem, people who consume more than the average amount of energy will have to pay for it at the market price rather than the heavily subsidised state rate.

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HEADLINE	07/17 Body shock: 6 ways heat affects the body
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/17/body-shock-six-ways-the-heat-affects-the-human-body
GIST	<p>Skin</p> <p>Sunburn is caused by excessive exposure to the sun’s ultraviolet (UV) rays. The more the body is subjected to sunburn, the more likely a person is to suffer from skin cancer. Too much UV radiation can damage skin cell DNA. DNA tells the cells how to function so, as the damage worsens with each repeated sunburn, cells can start growing out of control, which leads to skin cancer.</p> <p>Brain</p> <p>It can be hard to think clearly when you’re too hot. Studies have shown that extreme heat can affect mental performance. Hot weather has been linked to reduced cognitive function, judgment errors and higher risk of occupational injury. At extremely high temperatures, the blood-brain barrier begins to break down. Proteins and ions accumulate in the brain, causing inflammation.</p> <p>Many people report feeling irritable on hot days, and evidence suggests that extreme heat negatively affects mental health. A recent study in New York found that, on hot days, there were more emergency hospital visits due to substance abuse, mood and anxiety disorders, schizophrenia and dementia. Another study linked rising temperatures to higher suicide rates.</p> <p>Sweat</p> <p>The hypothalamus is the body’s thermostat. It senses temperature changes, inside the body and out, and makes adjustments to keep it within one or two degrees of 37C. When the brain senses that the body is warming, the hypothalamus sends messages to blood vessels near the skin, telling to them to dilate. This increases the amount of blood at the surface of the skin allowing it to lose heat – as long as the air is cooler than the body.</p>

If the air outside the body is hotter than inside, the body's sweat glands – all 1.6 to 5 million of them – get to work. Sweat is secreted on to the surface of the skin, where its evaporation has a cooling effect – because it takes heat energy from the body to turn the liquid into vapour.

But sweating isn't a perfect system. An active person can sweat up to 10 litres of water a day, and if this is not replaced, it can lead to dehydration. A body that is dehydrated can no longer cool itself by sweating. Also, if a body gets too hot, blood flow to the skin and sweating can both stop: in this case, body temperature soars and brain cells suffer irreversible damage.

Lungs

Hot weather can impact air quality, making it harder to breathe. High temperatures are typically accompanied by still air which allows pollutants to stagnate. Ground-level ozone is a harmful gas that forms when pollutants emitted by cars, power plants and industrial sources react chemically to sunlight.

One of the major constituents of smog, ground-level ozone can reduce lung function, and is a major factor in asthma morbidity and mortality. One 2008 study found that for every degree celsius the temperature rises, ozone pollution will kill an additional 22,000 people worldwide.

Fatigue

Hyperthermia is the term for the body reaching an abnormally high temperature. This happens when its various heat-regulating mechanisms fail to cope.

If body temperatures rises to around 38C, the brain tells the muscles to slow down, and fatigue sets in. This is called heat exhaustion. Symptoms of heat exhaustion also include dizziness, visual disturbances, intense thirst, nausea, palpitations and numbness.

If body temperature is not reduced, heat exhaustion can worsen to heatstroke. Heatstroke, which kicks in at 40C, should be treated as a medical emergency. Symptoms include dry, hot skin and mental dysfunction. Left untreated, heatstroke can cause seizures, coma and death.

Heart

As the body heats up, blood vessels dilate, and this lowers blood pressure, making a person feel dizzy and sick. At worst, when the body is deprived of normal bloodflow, the gut can leak, blood vessels can be damaged – causing blood to coagulate – and cells can disintegrate as their proteins break down. If blood pressure drops too far, the risk of heart attacks rises.

When the body senses it is too hot, the medulla oblongata – the part of the brain that controls vital processes including heartbeat, breathing and blood pressure – tells the heart to increase the amount of blood pumped for every beat. But with blood pressure lowered, the heart has to work harder to push the blood around the body, so the heart rate increases. At extreme temperatures, the quantity of blood circulated increases dramatically. The heart becomes exhausted and bloodflow can suddenly plummet. Experts say that as global temperatures rise so will mortality rates – and these deaths will be largely due to the stress extreme heat puts on the cardiovascular system.

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HEADLINE	07/17 Day 144 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/17/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-144-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seven civilians have been evacuated from Sviatohirsk Lavra in Ukraine's eastern region of Donetsk. Among those evacuated include a family with three children and two elderly people, according to Ukraine's defence ministry intelligence directorate. The youngest evacuee was born just a few days earlier at a monastery.• The Ukraine armed forces are advancing “confidently” towards Kherson, according to a Ukrainian military spokesperson. Natalia Hemeniuk, the head of the press centre of Operation

	<p>Command South, “speaking about what is happening directly in Kherson direction, we are advancing there. Maybe we are not moving as fast as those who present positive news would like, but believe me, these steps are very confident.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian forces are preparing for a new offensive, the Kyiv Independent reports. According to Vadym Skibitsky, a representative of the intelligence directorate at Ukraine’s defence ministry, Russian activity signals that “undoubtedly, preparations for the next stage of offensive actions are under way”. • The war in Ukraine “concerns the west as a whole” but at the same time must not lead to “forgetting Africa’s security” needs, France’s armed forces minister, Sebastien Lecornu, said. “We have a form of myopia in Europe and France, where the Ukraine war mobilises all our energy, and that is natural – it is a conflict that concerns the west as a whole,” Lecornu said in Ivory Coast on Saturday after visiting Niger. • “No Russian missiles or artillery can break our unity,” the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said in a statement on Saturday. In an address on the anniversary of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine, he added: “It should be equally obvious that it cannot be broken with lies or intimidation, fakes or conspiracy theories.” • All bodies have been identified after the Vinnytsia missile strike, the region’s governor announced. According to the Vinnytsia oblast governor, Serhii Borzov, 68 people are currently hospitalised, 14 of them are in serious condition. • Rescue operations after the Russian missile attack on Vinnytsia have concluded. Twenty-three people were killed, 202 injured, one person is missing and three others have been rescued in the central-west Ukrainian city, according to the country’s state emergency service. • Around 100 to 150 civilians were killed by Russian military strikes in Ukraine over the past two weeks, according to the Pentagon. In a briefing on Friday, a senior US military official said: “I think all told over the week ... we’re looking at between 100, 150, somewhere in there, civilian casualties, civilian deaths, this week in Ukraine as a result of Russian strikes.”
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HEADLINE	07/17 Forest fires rage in Europe amid heatwave
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/17/forest-fires-rage-across-europe-as-heatwave-sends-temperatures-soaring
GIST	<p>Firefighters in Portugal, Spain, France, Greece and Morocco are battling forest fires raging across tens of thousands of hectares as this week’s heatwave continues to bring extreme temperatures and cause hundreds of deaths across south-western Europe.</p> <p>The second heatwave of the summer – with temperatures of 47C (116F) in Portugal and 45C to Spain – has triggered wildfires that have forced the evacuation of thousands of people.</p> <p>In Portugal, the meteorological institute forecast temperatures of up to 42C with no respite before next week. The civil defence authorities, however, took advantage of a slight drop in temperatures after a July record of 47C on Thursday to try to stamp out one remaining major fire in the north of the country.</p> <p>“The risk of fires remains very high,” the civil defence chief, Andre Fernandes, said, although media reports said the number of active mainland fires were down to 11 from 20 earlier.</p> <p>“This is a weekend of extreme vigilance,” he added after a week in which two people were killed and more than 60 injured, and up to 15,000 hectares of forest and brushwood incinerated.</p> <p>In Portugal, a total of 39,550 hectares (98,000 acres) was ravaged by wildfires from the start of the year until mid-June, more than triple the area in the same period last year, data from the Institute for the Conservation of Nature and Forests showed.</p> <p>The Lisbon government was to decide on Sunday whether to extend a week-long state of contingency. Portugal’s health ministry said 238 people had died as a result of the heatwave from 7-13 July, most of them elderly people with underlying conditions.</p>

In **Spain**, the state meteorological agency maintained various levels of alert across the country, warning of temperatures of up to 44C in some regions.

Dozens of forest fires were raging on Saturday in different parts of the country, from the sweltering south to Galicia in the far north-west, where blazes laid waste to 3,500 hectares, the Galician regional government said.

One fire in the south caused the authorities to cordon off for more than 12 hours a section of a key highway connecting Madrid to the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, before the road reopened.

The fires have scorched thousands of hectares in the south-western Spanish region of Extremadura, while one blaze near the southern city of Málaga forced the preventive evacuation of more than 3,000 people, rescue services said.

A 60-year-old street-sweeper died after developing heatstroke while working in Madrid on Friday afternoon, prompting the city council to announce flexible working hours so municipal employees can avoid the hottest periods of the day.

Figures from Spain's Carlos III public health institute show there were 360 deaths attributable to the heat between last Sunday and Friday. On Friday alone, 123 people died.

Firefighters in the coastal town of Arcachon in **France's** south-western Gironde region were fighting to control two forest blazes that have destroyed more than 10,000 hectares (24,700 acres) this week.

"It's a herculean job," said Lieut-Col Olivier Chavatte, of the fire and rescue service, which has 1,200 firefighters and five planes in action.

Since Tuesday, more than 14,000 people in France – residents and tourists alike – have been forced to flee, and seven emergency shelters have been set up to receive evacuees.

Météo-France forecast temperatures of up to 41C in parts of southern France on Sunday, as well as up to 35C in the north-west, with new heat records expected on Monday.

On Saturday, France placed a further 22 departments, mainly down its Atlantic seaboard, on high orange alert, taking the total to 38.

Authorities in the French Alps urged climbers bound for Mont Blanc, Europe's highest mountain, to postpone their trip due to repeated rock falls caused by "exceptional climatic conditions" and drought.

The call came after a section of [Italy's biggest Alpine glacier gave way](#) at the start of the month, killing 11 people, in a disaster officials blamed on climate heating.

In **Greece**, the civil defence rushed to douse flames raging on the Mediterranean island of Crete, while **Morocco** was battling a forest fire in its northern mountains that killed at least one person and forced the evacuation of more than 1,000 families.

The fight against the flames has claimed the lives of a number of personnel, from a pilot killed when his plane crashed in northern Portugal to two who died in [Greece](#) when their helicopter fell into the sea.

The fires have been fanned by extreme temperatures that experts attribute to the climate crisis. **Croatia** and **Hungary** have also had wildfires this week, as has the US state of California.

Government ministers in the **UK** held an [emergency Cobra meeting on Saturday](#) after the meteorological agency issued a first-ever "red" warning for extreme heat, cautioning there is a "risk to life".

	<p>The Met Office said temperatures in southern England could exceed 40C on Monday or Tuesday for the first time, leading some schools to say they will stay closed next week.</p> <p>The London mayor, Sadiq Khan, advised Londoners to use public transport only if “absolutely necessary”. National train operators also warned passengers to avoid travel.</p> <p>Four people who had been helping firefighters tackle a wildfire in the US state of New Mexico died late on Saturday when the sheriff’s department helicopter they were travelling in crashed.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 China signals no change to Uighur policy
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/15/chinas-xi-in-xinjiang-signals-no-change-to-uyghur/
GIST	<p>BEIJING — Chinese leader Xi Jinping, on a visit this week to the Xinjiang region where his government is widely accused of oppressing predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities, showed no signs of backing off policies that have come under harsh criticism from the U.S. and many European countries.</p> <p>Xi stressed the full and faithful implementation of his ruling Communist Party’s approach in the region, highlighting social stability and lasting security as the overarching goals, the official Xinhua News Agency said Friday.</p> <p>Under his leadership, authorities have carried out a sweeping crackdown on Xinjiang’s Uyghur and Kazakh communities following an outburst of deadly separatist violence. While no exact figure has been released, analysts say hundreds of thousands and likely a million or more people have been detained over time.</p> <p>Critics have described the crackdown that placed thousands in prison-like indoctrination camps as cultural genocide. The U.S. and others have placed officials responsible under visa bans for their part in extralegal detentions, separation of families and incarcerating people for studying abroad or having foreign contacts.</p> <p>Xi, on what was described as an “inspection tour” from Tuesday to Friday, said that enhanced efforts should be made to uphold the principle that Islam in China must be Chinese in orientation, Xinhua said.</p> <p>While the needs of religious believers should be ensured, they should be united closely to the Communist Party and the government, the official news agency quoted him as saying.</p> <p>He called for educating and guiding people of all ethnic groups to strengthen their identification with the Chinese nation, culture and Communist Party.</p> <p>The Chinese leader called Xinjiang a “core area and a hub” in China’s program of building ports, railways and power stations connecting it to economies reaching from Central Asia to Eastern Europe. The U.S. has blocked some imports of cotton and other products from the region over reports of forced labor.</p> <p>Xi met with leaders of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, a supra-governmental body that operates its own courts, schools and health system under a military system imposed on the region after the Communist Party took power in China in 1949.</p> <p>Xi “learned about the history of the XPCC in cultivating and guarding the frontier areas,” Xinhua reported.</p> <p>Xinjiang borders Russia, Afghanistan and volatile Central Asia, which China has sought to draw within its orbit through economic incentives and security alliances.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/16 DOJ civil rights probe Maryland State Police
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/16/doj-investigating-md-state-police-discriminatory-h/

GIST	<p>The Department of Justice is heading a civil rights investigation into the Maryland State Police (MSP) over whether it engaged in racially discriminatory hiring and promotion practices.</p> <p>The investigation will be conducted pursuant to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, and religion.</p> <p>Under that section of the law, the DOJ can investigate state and local government employers where it has reason to believe that a “pattern or practice” of employment discrimination exists.</p> <p>The U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland is also taking part in the investigation.</p> <p>Kristen Clarke, the assistant attorney general with the DOJ’s Civil Rights Division, said that investigation will determine if MSP “created racially discriminatory barriers for Black people seeking job opportunities and promotions.” If the department has, Ms. Clarke said that the DOJ would identify the necessary reforms to make sure there are equal employment opportunities.</p> <p>The treatment of Black officers within MSP was previously reported on by WRC-TV, the NBC station for D.C.</p> <p>“There’s the good old boy system, and we’re not a part of it,” one trooper, who remained anonymous, told the station in 2021.</p> <p>Another trooper told WRC that “We always have to watch our backs — what we say, what we do,” and that it’s “never an even playing field.”</p> <p>Maryland State Police Superintendent Col. Jerry Jones said that “significant actions have been taken and are continuing to address even the perception of racism or unfair treatment of any kind” in a statement to the station.</p> <p>That included, according to Col. Jones’ statement, collaborating with the Coalition of Black Maryland State Troopers, the Legislative Black Caucus, the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, and the Maryland State Police Office of Equity and Inclusion to implement new procedures and initiatives.</p> <p>Col. Jones would go on to say that he welcomes the investigation and that MSP will cooperate fully with it.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/16 Gas prices to surge ahead of midterms?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/07/16/gas-price-increase-midterms/
GIST	<p>Drivers relieved by the recent dip in gas prices may be in for a shock when the summer winds down, with energy analysts warning a fresh round of price surges could emerge as soon as October.</p> <p>The prospect of a new gas price jolt coinciding with midterm elections has the White House and many Democrats on edge.</p> <p>The price concerns are tied to the timeline for stricter sanctions on Russia that will further choke the global oil supply. J.P. Morgan has warned that in a worst-case scenario — in which Russia retaliates by shutting down its supply altogether — the price of oil could jump to \$380 per barrel, more than triple what it is today.</p> <p>“If you were to ask me where could oil prices go, I would say pick a number,” said Michael Tran, managing director for global energy strategy at RBC Capital, who says that while the outlook is murky, several indicators point to a price rebound. “This is the tightest oil market we have seen in a generation or more.”</p>

The worrisome prognosis for consumers, coming as the nation is already struggling with historic levels of inflation, has the Biden administration grasping for interventions that could bring relief.

Yet U.S. political leaders are confronting the reality that even the most aggressive domestic political and policy measures often have scant impact over prices in a global oil market guided by forces out of their control.

Economists across the ideological spectrum warn that the measures the White House is promoting — [allowing Russian oil into the global market](#) at reduced prices, taxing [oil company](#) “windfall” profits, [cutting the federal gas tax](#) — could ultimately aggravate the energy crunch in the United States, rather than ease it.

“When things like this happen, we tend to focus on short-term fixes,” said Christopher Knittel, a professor of applied economics at MIT’s Sloan School of Management. “But, unfortunately, gas prices are not really something you can fix in the short term.”

The White House worries come at a moment consumers see gas prices as one of the few things in the economy trending in the right direction. The cost of a gallon has fallen from more than \$5 a month ago to a [national average of \\$4.60](#), according to AAA. Oil is trading for less than the price it did before Russia invaded Ukraine.

Concerns about a potential recession dampening demand have played big in the price drop.

Another key reason prices have fallen lately is that initial sanctions against Russia are far less effective than planned. The country’s oil is making its way into world markets despite the restrictions, [flowing to places like China and India](#). It means the global supply is not as tight as forecast when the United States and Europe initially joined forces to punish Russia over its invasion.

That could change with [the next round of planned sanctions](#). A full ban of cargo shipments of Russian oil to Europe is set to take hold on Dec. 5, with the market expected to factor in its impact much sooner.

The sanctions would be accompanied by a ban on insuring ships that carry Russian oil, preventing them from accessing international waterways. The insurance policies for most of the world’s oil cargo ships are written out of Europe.

As a result, Russia would confront steep new obstacles to moving its oil anywhere. The sanctions are intended to double the amount of Russian oil pulled from the market since the war began.

An internal U.S. Treasury analysis projects that could send the price of [oil soaring 50 percent above](#) where it is today. Some market analysts are warning of potentially steeper climbs, which could push gas prices beyond \$6 a gallon.

The warnings all come with caveats. In the event of more bad economic news signaling a prolonged recession, for example, prices would likely stabilize. Less gasoline is used when the economy is in retreat. A fresh round of coronavirus lockdowns in large Chinese cities would similarly weaken global demand and ease upward pressure on prices.

Yet the imbalance between oil and gasoline supply and demand is so pronounced right now that prices could swing back up months before new sanctions take effect, in the thick of the midterm campaign, said Kevin Book, managing director at ClearView Energy Partners, a research firm.

“People procuring oil make their bids early,” Book said. “It takes four to six weeks for it to be delivered. If they think a shortage is coming, they plan for it.”

The political and economic dilemma points to the challenges of using energy as a foreign policy cudgel.

“Energy sanctions were never the silver bullet people hoped,” said Edward Chow, an energy security scholar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies who worked in the industry for decades. “Politicians are telling voters that we can do this and people don’t have to sacrifice. It only works if you are willing to make sacrifices and actually cut demand.”

American lawmakers have shown little appetite for the conservation measures that the International Energy Agency is urging be implemented as part of the effort to assist Ukraine. The [10-point plan](#) the agency unveiled months ago — aimed at cutting oil demand by the equivalent of all the cars in China — calls on economically advanced nations to lower highway speed limits, make cities car-free one day a week and implement vehicle sharing.

The plans are seen as political losers in the United States, echoing the unpopular conservation initiatives that doomed the Carter administration when it confronted an energy crisis in the 1970s.

The White House is instead lobbying world leaders to agree on a novel price cap that would allow Russia to continue to sell its oil after Dec. 5 but at a heavily reduced price. The idea is to avoid a global shortage while also cutting the oil profits Russia uses to fund its war effort.

Although the plan has some prominent champions, energy experts are deeply skeptical. They warn that Russia has various levers it could pull to throw the market into chaos, including cutting off all shipments abroad, plunging countries like India deeper into crisis.

The J.P. Morgan warning, that oil prices could more than triple in a worst-case scenario, is premised on its finding that Russia’s economy can sustain a cut in oil production of millions of barrels per day.

“The problem is Russia gets a vote, too,” Book said. “Just because something has never been done before doesn’t necessarily mean it can’t be done. But sometimes there is a reason it has never been done.”

Chow called the effort “puzzling.” “I have not met a single person who has worked in the energy industry who believes this can work,” he said.

Other measures the Biden administration is pursuing would take aim at oil companies, heavily taxing the “windfall” profits they are earning from high prices. Leading Democrats argue that such actions are overdue.

“In my view, quite a lot of intervention is appropriate in this market,” said Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.). “You are not as government interfering in the marketplace. You are counteracting the anti-competitive effects of a cartel. Even if you are a free marketeer, it is fair game to knock down anti-competitive, cartel-driven practices.”

It is a potent argument and one that resonates with voters, who blame oil companies for high prices. But the United States has a history dating back to the Nixon administration of trying to use regulations to control prices at the pump. Knittel chronicled in a [detailed academic paper](#) how those efforts backfired, leading to oil shortages and long lines at gas stations in the 1970s.

The countries right now tinkering with aggressive market interventions are facing the same dilemma all over again. Before Russia invaded Ukraine, the Hungarian government imposed price controls capping the cost of gas at \$4.80 per gallon. Shortages followed. Drivers there are now prohibited from purchasing more than 13 gallons of fuel per day.

“Gas prices are set based on a world oil market, and it is tough for any one country to have an appreciable impact on that market in a short time period,” Knittel said. “The way to stop this is a rallying call for federal legislation that reduces demand for oil over the long term. So next time prices go up like this, it won’t hit us as hard.”

HEADLINE	07/17 Attention drawn to 'wrongful detentions'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/17/us/politics/griner-wrongful-detentions.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Brittney Griner. Austin Tice. The Citgo 6. And now, potentially, three American military veterans who were captured by enemy forces after traveling to Ukraine to fight Russia.</p> <p>They are among nearly 50 Americans who the State Department believes are wrongfully detained by foreign governments. At least a dozen more Americans are being held as hostages — including by extremist groups — or on criminal charges that their families dispute.</p> <p>American citizens are increasingly attractive targets for U.S. adversaries — including China, Russia, Iran and Venezuela — looking to use them as political pawns in battles with the United States.</p> <p>Ms. Griner, a professional basketball player, is perhaps the most high-profile American to be snared by what the State Department has called dubious charges. She was detained in February at an airport near Moscow after authorities said they found hashish oil in her luggage. Her arrest came just days before Russian forces invaded Ukraine, which is being armed by the United States and its allies.</p> <p>This past week, Jake Sullivan, the White House national security adviser, said the Biden administration would continue to work to make sure that Ms. Griner, Paul Whelan — another American held by Moscow — and “all unjustly detained Americans and hostages are home safely.”</p> <p>Here is a look at “wrongful detentions,” as they are known, and some of the struggles of Americans held overseas.</p> <p>What does ‘wrongfully detained’ mean?</p> <p>Generally, an American who is held by a foreign government for the purposes of influencing U.S. policy or extracting political or economic concessions from Washington is considered “wrongfully detained.” In these cases, negotiations between the United States and the other government are key to securing the American’s freedom.</p> <p>The State Department does not release the precise number of Americans that it has determined are in that category. But a senior State Department official said there were 40 to 50 wrongfully detained Americans abroad.</p> <p>“Hostage” is a blanket term used to describe Americans who have been blocked from leaving a foreign country. Some are held by terrorist organizations or other groups with whom the State Department does not have diplomatic relations. In these cases, the F.B.I. and other intelligence or law enforcement agencies lead negotiations.</p> <p>According to the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation, named for a journalist who was killed in Syria by the Islamic State in 2014, 64 Americans are wrongfully detained abroad or being held hostage.</p> <p>How long have some of the Americans been held?</p> <p>A wrongful detention can span a few days or weeks, or last years. One of the longest-detained Americans is Mr. Tice, a freelance journalist who was captured in Syria in 2012. U.S. officials believe he is being held by the Syrian government, which denies it.</p> <p>In a CBS News interview on Wednesday, Mr. Tice’s parents urged the Biden administration to meet with Syrian government officials even though diplomatic relations between the two countries have been formally suspended since 2012. “That’s what’s going to bring Austin home,” said his mother, Debra Tice. President Biden met with Mr. Tice’s parents in May and promised “to work through all available avenues” for his release, according to a White House statement.</p>

Siamak Namazi, an American detained in Iran, said last month that the Iranian government would apparently free him and its other captives, including his father, only if the Biden administration offered “sufficient incentives.”

“Tehran seems to be demanding more for our release than the White House can stomach,” Mr. Namazi, who has been held in Iran since 2015, [wrote in a guest essay](#) for The New York Times.

What is the State Department doing to get them released?

The State Department’s Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs handles negotiations for wrongfully detained Americans.

The office has grown to about 25 negotiators and other officials in recent years, up from five, as more Americans are detained by foreign governments. Each case is assigned an expert on the country where the person is being held.

The process is extremely difficult, said the senior State Department official, who spoke on the condition that he not be named to describe some functions of the office.

All of the foreign governments that are detaining Americans have, at best, rocky relations with the United States. In some cases, like Iran, messages are sent through other governments that serve as intermediaries; in others, U.S. officials work through levels of the foreign government’s bureaucracy to get to someone senior enough to influence a decision.

The communications are intended to reinforce the consequences of continuing to hold Americans captive, the official said.

He said foreign governments often felt as if they were the aggrieved party and usually began with demands that he called unreasonable.

The State Department does not provide legal assistance to the detained Americans or their families.

Does the United States pay ransom or swap prisoners?

[A 2015 directive](#) by President Barack Obama prohibits promising “ransom, prisoner releases, policy changes or other acts of concession” to bring detained Americans home. The policy takes away key incentives for hostage takers to detain Americans in the first place and prevents the exchange of U.S. revenue or other resources that could be used for other nefarious activities, the document notes.

But there have been numerous prisoner swaps with foreign governments to free detained Americans — most recently [Trevor Reed](#), who was held for two years in Russia before his release in April. A Russian pilot who was imprisoned in the United States on cocaine trafficking charges was simultaneously released as part of the negotiations.

Mr. Reed had suffered from tuberculosis while in prison, making his case all the more urgent.

Similarly, U.S. officials [late last month](#) tried to persuade the Venezuelan government to release Matthew Heath from an underground prison cell for humanitarian reasons after his family said he had tried to kill himself. President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela has refused, although he [freed two other Americans](#) in March.

Iran is holding Mr. Namazi and three other Americans while Tehran negotiates with world powers over limiting its nuclear program. The chief U.S. negotiator, Robert Malley, has said the fate of the detained Americans is not directly tied to the talks.

“But I will say it is very hard for us to imagine getting back into the nuclear deal while four innocent Americans are being held hostage by Iran,” he [told Reuters](#) in January.

Does public pressure or other publicity help?

It depends.

In some cases, major displays of public pressure might not help matters, the senior State Department official said. Fear of provoking an already hostile government is among the reasons negotiations are conducted in secret.

Family members of many wrongfully detained Americans also are cautious about discussing the details of cases as relayed to them by the State Department or other officials — partially for security reasons and partially to ensure the U.S. government does not hold back any updates.

But some have set up advocacy networks to pressure the U.S. government to negotiate more aggressively and, above all, to make certain that their loved ones are not forgotten.

“We wake up every day knowing that they are suffering far more than we could imagine — so much so that many of them dread waking up at all,” the relatives of 19 Americans captured abroad wrote in a letter to Mr. Biden in June.

Ms. Griner used the public attention to her case to ask Mr. Biden to intervene not just on her behalf, but also on behalf of other Americans who are wrongfully detained.

“I realize you are dealing with so much, but please don’t forget about me and the other American detainees,” she said [in a handwritten note to the president](#) this month. “Please do all you can to bring us home.”

Russia has hinted at wanting to swap Ms. Griner [for Viktor Bout](#), a former Soviet military officer who was convicted in New York in 2011 of running an international arms-smuggling ring.

After Ms. Griner pleaded guilty to drug charges this month, maintaining that she did not intend to break the law, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei A. Ryabkov of Russia said that the “hype and publicity” surrounding her detention “creates interference in the truest sense of the word.”

In some situations, particularly when the Americans are already well known, the State Department official said public attention could help.

But more often than not, and even when it appears outwardly that negotiations are at a halt, officials are quietly working on the case, he said.

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HEADLINE	07/17 ND corn mill: local, national security issue?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/17/us/grand-forks-north-dakota-fufeng-china.html
GIST	<p>GRAND FORKS, N.D. — For years, the leaders of Grand Forks had their eyes on a patch of cropland north of town, not far from a pasta-making facility, a potato processor and a state-owned flour mill where farmers received top dollar for their wheat. That muddy field, they thought, would be the perfect place for another agriculture business.</p> <p>So when Fufeng USA, the American subsidiary of a Chinese company that makes components for animal feed, announced last year that it wanted to build a corn mill in that field, officials in Grand Forks celebrated. The mill, they said, would bring as many as 1,000 construction jobs and more than 200 permanent jobs to the city. Gov. Doug Burgum, a Republican, described it as a “huge opportunity” for all of North Dakota.</p> <p>But what local politicians lauded as an unambiguous win soon divided Grand Forks. Some residents were excited by the prospect of more jobs and investment, but the company’s ties to China turned others against the project. Anti-Fufeng signs, including hammer-and-sickle flags, popped up in yards. City Council</p>

meetings that used to focus on road design and utility contracts suddenly turned into fiery discussions about communism and spying. Within a few months, the debate had reached Capitol Hill, and Grand Forks, population 59,000, had revealed just how mistrustful and dysfunctional America's relationship with China has become.

For decades, the large flows of money and merchandise between the two nations made it the world's most important economic partnership even as the United States pressed China to improve its human rights record. But attitudes toward China have turned sharply negative as politicians from both parties have increasingly portrayed the country as a threat, and as the pandemic helped fuel a rise in anti-Asian racism and highlighted Beijing's embrace of a tougher authoritarianism.

The backlash in Grand Forks reflects the rising animosity and the tough questions the United States faces as it tries to reconcile public sentiment with an economic reality. Americans buy more goods from China than they do from any other country, China is a top destination for U.S. exports, and many Chinese firms have operations in the United States. Trying to unwind that relationship could mean higher prices and slower growth.

In Grand Forks, city leaders who welcomed investment at a tumultuous economic moment grappled with how the city's desire to spur more growth fit into the context of geopolitical trends.

"I think what you've seen, at least recently, is a large push away from globalization," said Mayor Brandon Bochenski, a first-term Republican who supports the new mill and added that it would be Grand Forks's largest economic development effort in recent history. He asked: "Are we going to be the first one to basically say no to globalism?"

'Not a Local Issue'

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, when an aviation company with a Grand Forks factory was struggling, a firm owned by the Chinese government bought the company. Back then, the residents of Grand Forks, 75 miles south of the Canadian border, were mostly relieved that the facility stayed open. Eleven years later, the company, Cirrus Aircraft, has expanded, remaining a centerpiece of the Grand Forks economy.

But the new corn mill proposal came at a different moment.

A recent [Pew poll](#) found that 76 percent of Americans surveyed had an unfavorable view of China, and that 90 percent believed China did not respect the personal freedoms of its people.

Right after Fufeng said in late 2021 that it was coming to Grand Forks, people voiced the sorts of everyday concerns that come with many large-scale projects. They worried about whether the city had enough water to support the facility's wet-milling process, which extracts amino acids from corn. They worried about odor. About traffic.

Over the course of a few weeks, the conversation started to shift. Around town and online, some people began to focus on the company's ties to China.

There was no single, specific fear about the project.

Some people listed a range of human rights violations in China. Others had economic objections, questioning the wisdom of doing business with a country that the United States has [named as a chief competitor](#) for global influence, and whose espionage efforts the [F.B.I. has called](#) a "grave threat to the economic well-being and democratic values of the United States." Some in Grand Forks said that they believed the mill would be used to spy on an Air Force base about 15 miles away, a claim the company denied.

“It’s not a local issue. It’s a national security issue,” said Beth Waldeck, a retired teacher and Christian radio host. “I personally think that our City Council has been sold a bill of goods by Fufeng and they have stars in their eyes because they see money coming in, they see growth coming in.”

Most of the debate has been within the mainstream of today’s political discourse, echoing some of the [nationalist](#), China-skeptical themes of the Trump administration’s foreign policy and the continued concern about China voiced by members of the Biden administration. But a few opponents of the project have espoused far-fetched theories, or used language that some considered anti-Asian scaremongering.

In just a few weeks, residents knocked on doors and organized drive-through sites, collecting more than 4,700 signatures, or 8 percent of residents, on a petition seeking a citywide vote on Fufeng. The petitions were rejected on technical grounds because the city said the issue didn’t qualify for a referendum. But objections continued to mount.

Ben Grzadzielewski, who helped gather petitions and is appealing their rejection, said his most pressing concern was the amount of water the mill would require, but that he also questioned doing business with a Chinese company. He was frustrated, he said, with the response of city leaders, who he said “try to make us look like tinfoil hat people.”

All of it caught city leaders off guard. Under growing pressure, they pledged to check with federal officials to make sure there were no national security concerns.

“I don’t think we quite had the clarity to understand that national-level politics were going to make their way to our local level,” said Shawn Gaddie, a civil engineer who is the secretary-treasurer of the board of the local Economic Development Corporation, which helped woo Fufeng to Grand Forks. “We just didn’t see that coming.”

‘Maybe It’s Just a Corn Mill’

In April, Grand Forks officials invited the F.B.I. to brief them on Fufeng.

But that meeting, which started as an effort to allay fears, may have only increased suspicions.

At the request of the F.B.I., the meeting was held behind closed doors. Some residents who wanted to hear what the agency had to say held a protest. And though Grand Forks officials said they were left with the impression that there were no national security concerns about Fufeng, they acknowledged that the F.B.I. would not confirm that explicitly, leaving critics of the project unsatisfied.

Grand Forks is not a moribund city in desperate need of work.

Unlike in [Maine](#), where Chinese investors resurrected an old mill a few years ago, or [Ohio](#), where a Chinese glassmaker opened up shop in an abandoned General Motors factory, there is no jobs crisis in Grand Forks. The city is growing, the metro unemployment rate is below the national average, and employers are hiring. In addition to jobs in agriculture and the military, residents work in manufacturing or at the University of North Dakota, known for its aviation program and powerhouse hockey team.

Still, Mr. Bochenski, the mayor, has stressed the economic benefits of Fufeng for his city, where 18 percent of residents live in poverty, well above the national rate. Farmers have welcomed the project as a new place to sell their corn, which grows in abundance in the fertile soil along the Red River. And Governor Burgum, a former businessman, has repeatedly stood by the project.

“With Fufeng in Grand Forks, it will be North Dakota — not China — that reaps the benefits of the jobs, facilities, economic activity and tax revenue associated with processing the corn,” a statement from the governor said.

It is fairly common for a Chinese company to do business in the United States, and for an American company to do business in China.

But as diplomatic relations have frayed, American officials, especially Republicans, have questioned whether the United States has grown too close to China economically, and whether seemingly innocuous Chinese investments could be used for nefarious purposes.

“Maybe it’s just a corn mill,” Senator Tom Cotton, Republican of Arkansas, told Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., the chief of staff of the Air Force, in May during a hearing of the Senate Armed Services [Committee](#). “But it would also provide the potential at least for Chinese intelligence to engage in intelligence collection of various kinds.”

General Brown told Mr. Cotton that he was unable to discuss Fufeng in an open hearing. Air Force media relations officials did not respond to repeated questions by The Times about Fufeng.

Senator Mark Warner of Virginia, a Democrat who chairs the Intelligence Committee, said in a statement that we “should be seriously concerned about Chinese investment in locations close to sensitive sites, such as military bases,” when he was asked about the Fufeng project. And on Thursday, both of North Dakota’s senators, Kevin Cramer and John Hoeven, along with Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, all Republicans, sent a [letter](#) to the Defense and Treasury secretaries asking for a federal review of whether the project raised national security concerns.

Fufeng has said it will submit its plans to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, which in recent years has examined several proposed Chinese investments, including the takeover of a major pork processor (approved) and the purchase of a money transfer firm (blocked).

The federal government has had little to say on the record about the project, which proponents of Fufeng have interpreted as an all-clear sign and opponents have deemed suspicious.

Eric Chutorash, Fufeng USA’s chief operating officer, said any suggestion that the facility would be used to spy on or harm the United States was false.

“Businesses operate in a different environment than the government operates in,” Mr. Chutorash said, adding that “we really have no relationship with the Chinese government.”

Mr. Chutorash, who is based in the Chicago area, said “we’re going to buy corn locally in the U.S., we’re going to manufacture in the U.S., and we’re going to sell in the U.S.”

Liu Pengyu, a spokesman for China’s embassy in Washington, noted in a statement that Fufeng is a privately owned company. “We oppose the malicious generalization of the concept of national security,” he said.

Over residents’ complaints, the Grand Forks City Council approved the mill plans with votes in [February](#) and in [June](#) that created a development agreement with Fufeng and annexed the proposed construction site, which had been just outside of Grand Forks, into city limits.

A Lasting Cost

When the City Council approved plans with Fufeng, Katie Dachtler was the only member who voted no. Ms. Dachtler, who represented a ward near where the mill would be built, said her residents had legitimate concerns about the project, and she thought it was moving ahead too quickly.

Still, Ms. Dachtler, a political independent who was the Council’s only Asian American member, said the fight over the mill had exposed some longstanding racial biases. She said some opponents of the project had repeatedly equated the Chinese government with Chinese people, and others had been too slow to call out the hurtful language. About 82 percent of Grand Forks residents are white, and 3 percent are Asian.

“Hate can only percolate — and I’m going to call it hate and people are going to cringe and not like that at all — but hate can only percolate underground for so long,” said Ms. Dachtler, who was born in South

Korea, and whose term ended last month after she did not seek re-election. “At some point the pressure has to be relieved. And Fufeng has served as a catalyst for some of these folks to release that pressure.”

A journalist for The Grand Forks Herald covering a protest of the closed-door F.B.I. meeting [photographed](#) one man with a sign that read, in part, “China Gave US Covid!” A [letter to the editor](#) of The Herald opposing the project mentioned dog meat. And Ms. Dachtler said some opponents of the project made a special point of repeatedly saying “Chinese Communist Party” in a way that concerned her.

“Semantics matter to people, and the things we say to people make them feel welcomed or like they don’t belong here,” Ms. Dachtler said.

Several opponents of the mill said they harbored no ill will toward Chinese people or Asian Americans but were worried about deepening business ties with a country whose government they considered an adversary.

“It’s not about the Chinese people,” said Jodi Carlson, a semiretired nurse. “It’s not about the Chinese culture. It is about Chinese communist government.”

One sign of how tense the debate has become came last month, when a Grand Forks police officer and an F.B.I. agent visited Ms. Carlson’s home after she accused the mayor of failing to listen to the will of the people. In a Facebook post, Ms. Carlson cited a portion of the Declaration of Independence that said it was a duty to “throw off” despotic governments. Ms. Carlson said in an interview that she had not been calling for violence, and a Grand Forks police report said she had not committed a crime.

Among opponents of the project, there has been disagreement about how much to focus on China and how much to focus on more traditional concerns, like environmental issues. Frank Matejcek, a semiretired farmer who owns land near the proposed construction site, said city officials had not been transparent in the annexation process and had failed to address his concerns about wastewater from the mill. But China was not his biggest worry, he said.

Construction on the Fufeng site remains at least several months away, and it will be at least a couple of years before any corn is milled there.

City leaders are already wondering what the backlash to this project might mean for the next international company looking to do business in North Dakota.

“We just want to be rational as we work through all those issues,” said Todd Feland, the city administrator. “If we’re going to say no to any Chinese investment, that’s going to limit our opportunities in the future.”

But tensions continue to rise.

At a [City Council meeting](#) in June, a man from another part of North Dakota said he believed that Fufeng planned to “infiltrate everything our military does” and suggested that officials who could not see that might be “working for the Chinese.” He was reprimanded by Mr. Bochenski after saying “I’ll come across this table,” a remark the mayor described as threatening.

When the man finished talking, members of the audience loudly applauded.

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HEADLINE	07/15 Chronic nursing shortage worsens
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/15/us/hospital-nursing-shortage.html
GIST	American hospitals are once again filling up with coronavirus patients — but not with nurses to care for them. The nation’s chronic shortage of registered nurses is as bad in some parts of the country as it has ever been, experts say, and it is showing signs of getting worse.

[Hospitalizations have risen steadily](#) in recent weeks, and the daily average number of people in hospitals who are infected with the coronavirus now exceeds 39,000, the highest it has been since the waning days of the first Omicron surge in early March. The rise [is being driven largely by BA.5](#), a rapidly spreading Omicron subvariant that is the [best yet at evading some antibodies](#) from previous infections or vaccines.

But in the face of the growing need, hospitals across the country say they still cannot find enough nurses.

In New York State, [the shortage](#) is at an “all-time high,” said Matthew Allen, a registered nurse at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City and a board member of the New York State Nurses Association. “It’s just historic, more than it’s ever been before,” Mr. Allen said, noting that as of last week, Mount Sinai’s hospital network alone had 771 unfilled registered nurse and nurse practitioner positions.

Nearly 14 percent of nursing jobs at acute-care hospitals in Massachusetts are unfilled, a shortfall that has doubled in size since 2019, according to a [recent survey by the Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association](#). The association found more than 5,000 unfilled nursing positions at hospitals in the state.

To close the gaps, hospitals are offering financial incentives for new hires, bringing in more freelance nurses and in some cases cutting services that they cannot adequately staff to provide.

Martin General Hospital, a 49-bed facility in eastern North Carolina, said this week that it would temporarily shut down its intensive care unit starting in August because of the difficulty of finding nurses.

“The critical shortage levels are even more challenging in rural areas,” John Jacobson, the hospital’s chief executive, said in a statement.

At Johnson Memorial Hospital in Stafford Springs, Conn., inpatient and outpatient surgery has been halted since June 9. The hospital said on Wednesday that it would seek to discontinue inpatient surgical services permanently, and would shut down its labor and delivery unit, in part because of staffing shortages, according to Mary Orr, a hospital spokeswoman.

The shortage of nurses in Florida is “probably the worst” that hospitals have experienced in decades, said Mary Mayhew, chief executive of the Florida Hospital Association, which represents more than 200 hospitals and health systems in the state.

Part of the problem, Ms. Mayhew said, was the large number of nurses who were leaving regular hospital jobs to earn more money as temporary and contract nurses. “We have a turnover rate that is 25 to 30 percent, the highest we have ever seen in the decades we’ve been tracking that data,” she said.

The reliance of the association’s member hospitals on temporary nursing staff, once minimal, has soared more than fivefold since 2019, Ms. Mayhew said.

Broward Health, a health care system in Florida, is trying to fill 400 vacant nursing positions by offering bonuses of up to \$20,000 and other incentives, a hospital spokesperson said.

Demand for nurses is projected to keep growing significantly in the United States. The McKinsey consulting firm [projected in a report in May](#) that the nation could face a shortage of up to 450,000 nurses by 2025.

[Demand for travel nurses](#), who are brought in from out of town by staffing agencies to fill gaps at hospitals for a few weeks or months, climbed to a record high in 2021, and after receding somewhat earlier this year, has been rising steadily again since May, according to April Hansen, group president at Aya Healthcare, one of the nation’s major providers of travel nurses.

“It’s been like a roller coaster,” Ms. Hansen said. “We are at a point in time now where demand is more than double the steady-state demand that existed in prepandemic times.”

	<p>She said wages for travel nurses were 20 percent higher now than before the pandemic took hold, and at one point had spiked to about double the prepandemic average.</p> <p>While Aya Healthcare declined to be specific about the wages, another staffing company, Vivian Health, said in a June report that the national average for travel nurse pay was \$3,004 a week, a 23 percent increase from the previous year's average of \$2,450.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 Bat virus studies raises questions on risks
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/15/science/bat-coronavirus-laboratory-experiments.html
GIST	<p>In mid-2020, a team of scientists catching bats in Laotian caves discovered coronaviruses that were strikingly similar to the one that had begun wreaking havoc around the world.</p> <p>In the months since, some of those researchers have been studying one of these mysterious bat viruses in a high-security laboratory in Paris, hoping to discover clues about how its cousin, SARS-CoV-2, went on to become a global threat that has killed an estimated 15 million people.</p> <p>Their work has been scientifically fruitful. Last year, the scientists discovered that the bat virus was capable of latching on to human cells, at least in Petri dishes. Last month, the team reported more reassuring news: that the virus is not particularly harmful to lab animals. The finding suggests that SARS-CoV-2 evolved its abilities to spread quickly and cause deadly disease only after the two lineages branched apart on the viral evolutionary tree.</p> <p>If the Laotian virus were to ever jump from a bat to a person, the new research suggests, it might cause a mild stomach bug rather than a life-threatening pneumonia. Nevertheless, lab experiments like these rekindle a longstanding debate among scientists about the wisdom of tinkering with viruses that are so closely related to a known pathogen.</p> <p>Proponents argue that this kind of data is crucial for understanding — and preventing — pandemics. For example, the new studies have tested whether bat viruses could evolve a “furin cleavage site,” a feature of SARS-CoV-2 that allows it to efficiently infect human cells.</p> <p>“Our motivation was to try to give some insight regarding the origin of Covid,” said Marc Eloit, a virologist at the Pasteur Institute in Paris who is leading the effort.</p> <p>But critics say that scientists should not run experiments that might make viruses better able to spread among people, given the small but real chance that these altered pathogens might infect lab workers and escape into the outside world.</p> <p>“For me, the benefits of this work are outweighed by the risks,” said Dr. David Relman, a microbiologist at Stanford University.</p> <p>The furin site</p> <p>The bat virus at the center of Dr. Eloit’s experiments came to light on an expedition to limestone caves in northern Laos in the summer of 2020. A team of Laotian and French researchers caught bats flying out of the caves and took samples of their saliva, blood, urine and feces.</p> <p>The scientists found genetic material from five coronaviruses closely related to SARS-CoV-2. In the feces from a Marshall’s horseshoe bat, they found whole viruses of a strain they named BANAL-236 (a code indicating the virus came from a bat anal swab).</p> <p>Once back in their lab, the scientists found that BANAL-236 can infect human cells by binding tightly to the same protein that SARS-CoV-2 uses to gain entry. In February, the researchers published these findings in the journal Nature.</p>

Last month, they released a [second wave of results](#), now under review by a scientific journal, in which they investigated the virus's behavior in laboratory mice and monkeys.

In one experiment, the scientists injected the virus into genetically engineered mice commonly used to study Covid. SARS-CoV-2 replicates quickly in their lungs, just as it does in people, causing them to lose weight and die.

BANAL-236, by contrast, struggled to take hold in the animals' lungs, producing only about 1 percent of the viruses created in a SARS-CoV-2 infection.

The researchers found that the virus was even milder when they sprayed it into the noses of two monkeys. BANAL-236 replicated mainly in their guts, rather than their lungs.

Dr. Eloit suspects BANAL-236 is milder because it lacks a key feature important to the success of SARS-CoV-2.

After a new SARS-CoV-2 virus is created in a cell, its spike protein changes shape, with an effect like spring-loading a crossbow. When the virus then binds to a new cell, the primed spike protein shoots out molecular bolts that draw it into its new host.

This shape-shifting region of the spike — known as the furin cleavage site — is crucial to the success of SARS-CoV-2. When scientists have [engineered](#) viruses lacking this site, the mutants struggle to replicate in the lungs of lab animals or spread to new hosts.

Serial passage

Gaining a furin cleavage site may have been a crucial step in the evolution of SARS-CoV-2. To explore that possibility, Dr. Eloit and his colleagues ran lab experiments to give BANAL-236 a chance to evolve new traits, such as a furin cleavage site.

The team based its studies on [experiments](#) in which other scientists had injected bird flu viruses into chicken eggs and waited for them to replicate. They then transferred the new viruses into new eggs, and again allowed them to replicate. With every transfer, the virus had a chance to evolve. After 11 transfers, the scientists found that the flu viruses had evolved cleavage sites, making them deadlier to chickens.

In a similar fashion, the Pasteur researchers removed lung tissue from mice infected with BANAL-236 and used the tissue to infect healthy animals. They then repeated the cycle, transferring viruses from mouse to mouse.

In another experiment, they infected a dish of human intestinal cells with BANAL-236, then used the new viruses produced by the cells to infect new dishes.

But for both experiments, Dr. Eloit and his colleagues decided against going as far as 11 transfers, stopping at six.

“From a purely scientific point of view, we wanted to do more than six passages,” Dr. Eloit said. “But we did not want to open the risk to adapting a bat virus to humans.”

BANAL-236 did not gain a furin cleavage site in either experiment. The virus did acquire other mutations, but they did not make it any better at infecting mouse lungs.

Scientists have been running such evolutionary experiments — known as “serial passage” — for more than a century. In fact, [vaccines](#) for a number of viruses such as yellow fever were created by growing them in the lab: The viruses evolved in Petri dishes into milder forms that were safe to inject into people.

In 2011, however, a [controversy](#) broke out about the safety of serial passage experiments that might produce new human pathogens. At the time, researchers were studying how influenza viruses that cause intestinal infections in birds can evolve into airborne forms that can infect people.

Two teams of researchers sprayed bird flu viruses into the noses of ferrets, waited for the viruses to replicate and then transferred the new viruses to new ferrets. Soon [the viruses evolved](#) to become better at replicating in the ferrets.

Some critics said the research was so reckless that it shouldn't be published, for fear that other researchers would copy the work and accidentally release a new pandemic strain of flu. The United States government [halted](#) experiments like these in order to develop a new policy for judging their safety.

Some of the studies started up again in recent years. But Dr. Relman of Stanford and others have [complained](#) that the current regulations are not transparent enough.

Dr. Eloit said a Pasteur Institute committee that reviews potentially risky biological research authorized his team's proposal for studying the new bat viruses. The scientists then carried out their experiments at the same level of security as their other work with the coronaviruses, known as Biosafety Level 3, or [BSL-3](#).

Dr. Tom Inglesby, the director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, said it was good that the scientists put thought into these potential risks. But he also said he wanted to see a clear rationale for deciding that six passages were safe.

"It's not possible to know ahead of time if these experiments would lead to more transmissible or more virulent viruses," he said. "There's no hard and fast rule that six is safe and more is not."

But Thomas Peacock, a virologist at Imperial College London, said he thought that Dr. Eloit and his colleagues had been sufficiently prudent. In earlier studies, he pointed out, the researchers had found that antibodies produced by people during Covid infections were very potent against BANAL-236. That most likely meant that if the virus were to leak out of a lab, it wouldn't be able to spread very far.

"This virus would probably hit a brick wall in the general population," Dr. Peacock said. "I don't really have much issue with the experiments."

Origins of Covid

Other researchers agreed with Dr. Eloit that the research could shed light on how and when SARS-CoV-2 spilled over into people.

For Dr. Eloit, his team's inability to produce a furin cleavage site on BANAL-236 in mice or human intestinal cells suggests that the SARS-CoV-2 lineage gained the furin site in bats before spilling over into people. He said it would not have been easy for the virus to gain a furin site after jumping into another species of animal — sometimes called "intermediate hosts" — such as those sold at a [market](#) in Wuhan, China. "I do not see any strong arguments in favor of an intermediate host," Dr. Eloit said.

But scientists who favor the market scenario see the new results in a different light. If the researchers couldn't spur BANAL-236 to evolve the furin site during serial passage experiments, they reasoned, then it's unlikely that scientists in a Wuhan lab could have done so with SARS-CoV-2, as some proponents of the "lab leak" [theory](#) have suggested.

"This is another nail in the coffin of the lab leak theory that by now should be firmly sealed in the crypt," said Edward Holmes, a virologist at the University of Sydney.

Dr. Peacock was reluctant to draw strong conclusions from such small-scale experiments. "I think it's quite a difficult thing to ask to get a furin site after a few passages," he said.

Dr. Eloit and his colleagues are now exploring the possibility that ancestors of SARS-CoV-2 gained a furin cleavage site while still in wild bats. The virus might have then spread to an intermediate host or directly to people exposed to bats — like those who collect bat guano, hunt bats or eat them.

To test that idea, the scientists are working to obtain more samples from bats in Laos and neighboring countries. Dr. Eloit can't say whether their hypothesis is more likely than the others, but it is at least one they can investigate.

“Our work as scientists,” he said, “is to explore the working hypotheses that we can explore.”

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HEADLINE	07/16 Unspoken: Khashoggi case setback
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/16/world/middleeast/khashoggi-biden-mohammed-bin-salman.html
GIST	<p>Since entering the White House, President Biden had refused to meet with, and even speak to, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, seeking to punish him with ostracism for the grisly murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents in 2018.</p> <p>But that objection fell by the wayside on Friday when Mr. Biden and Prince Mohammed met face-to-face during Mr. Biden's first trip to Saudi Arabia for a regional summit focused on oil and Iran.</p> <p>The two leaders briefly discussed the case, according to U.S. and Saudi officials, but effectively agreed to disagree on Prince Mohammed's culpability before announcing a slew of initiatives aimed at emphasizing the close partnership between their countries.</p> <p>And with that, the last high-level effort to hold Prince Mohammed accountable for the murder ended.</p> <p>The two leaders' conversation happened behind closed doors, and slightly different accounts emerged.</p> <p>Mr. Biden told reporters that he had confronted Prince Mohammed privately about what he called an “outrageous” killing at the start of their meeting, even telling the prince that Mr. Biden held him responsible for it.</p> <p>“I made my view crystal clear,” Mr. Biden said.</p> <p>Separately, Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi minister of state for foreign affairs, described to reporters a less contentious exchange about human rights in which the killing was briefly mentioned.</p> <p>Calling the killing “a terrible mistake,” Mr. al-Jubeir said that those responsible for the crime had been punished, that the United States and Saudi Arabia had moved on, and that the United States was in no position to criticize, recalling the torture of detainees in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison by American troops.</p> <p>Mr. Khashoggi was one of Saudi Arabia's highest-profile journalists and was for years considered a palace insider who could effectively explain the kingdom's point of view.</p> <p>But after Prince Mohammed came to power 2015, Mr. Khashoggi criticized the prince's lack of tolerance for dissenting views and, fearing arrest, fled to the United States, where he wrote columns for The Washington Post that critiqued the prince's initiatives.</p> <p>In October 2018, Mr. Khashoggi entered the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to obtain documents that he needed to marry his Turkish fiancée. He never came out.</p> <p>Turkish officials and a United Nations investigator later detailed how he had been confronted by a hit squad dispatched from Saudi Arabia that strangled him and injected him with a tranquilizer, killing him. A forensic doctor then dismembered his body and a body double wandered around Istanbul, wearing Mr. Khashoggi's clothes in a failed attempt to convince the world that he was still alive.</p>

	<p>For weeks, Saudi officials denied that the kingdom was behind his crime, but the perpetrators were caught on camera and identified, and some were closely linked to Prince Mohammed.</p> <p>Saudi officials eventually acknowledged Mr. Khashoggi's murder, but insisted that it had been carried out by rogue agents with no such orders from Riyadh.</p> <p>Although Prince Mohammed said he had no foreknowledge of the plot, the murder left a deep stain on his efforts to bill himself as a forward-looking reformer. A Saudi trial that found eight men guilty in connection with the killing did little to quell international outrage.</p> <p>The killing of Mr. Khashoggi was a primary reason that Mr. Biden vowed during his election campaign to treat the Saudis "like the pariah that they are."</p> <p>In the White House, he authorized the release of a C.I.A. assessment saying that the prince had authorized the operation that led to Mr. Khashoggi's death. Mr. Biden also refused to speak with Prince Mohammed, saying that his own counterpart was the king.</p> <p>Until Friday, that is, when Mr. Biden sat down with Prince Mohammed to discuss oil supplies, regional security and other issues.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/16 Different read-outs Biden in Saudi Arabia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/16/world/middleeast/biden-khashoggi-truth.html
GIST	<p>JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia — As President Biden told the tale, it sounded pretty dramatic.</p> <p>After meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, on Friday for the first time since taking office, the president insisted that he had pointedly blamed him for the murder of the columnist Jamal Khashoggi.</p> <p>"He basically said that he was not personally responsible for it," Mr. Biden recounted to reporters. "I indicated that I thought he was."</p> <p>The only hitch? That's not the way it happened, according to Saudi officials. Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi minister of state for foreign affairs, who was present for the encounter, told reporters that he had not heard the president blame the crown prince.</p> <p>The White House on Saturday did not back down. "The president was very clear about the conversation, and we stand by his account," said John Kirby, the coordinator for strategic communications at the National Security Council.</p> <p>Asked by reporters after landing back in Washington whether the Saudi minister was telling the truth, Mr. Biden replied simply, "No." He seemed exasperated by the second-guessing of his trip. When a reporter asked if he regretted the fist bump he had greeted Prince Mohammed with, he complained, "Why don't you guys talk about something that matters?"</p> <p>Both sides had an interest in spinning the closed-door meeting. Mr. Biden has been denounced by rights groups, media organizations and politicians in both parties for meeting with the crown prince, who the C.I.A. says ordered the 2018 operation that killed Mr. Khashoggi, a United States resident and columnist for The Washington Post. By promoting how tough he was behind closed doors, the president clearly hoped to defuse some of the criticism for abandoning his campaign promise to make Saudi Arabia a "pariah."</p> <p>For their part, the Saudis were eager to present the meeting as a return to business as usual between the leaders of two longtime allies, and had every hope of minimizing the lasting import of the Khashoggi case.</p>

Mr. Jubeir confirmed to reporters that Mr. Biden had raised the matter but characterized it in less confrontational terms. The last thing the Saudis wanted was the image of a president lecturing their young leader.

Indeed, both sides were acutely attuned to the choreography of the encounter. American news photographers traveling in the White House motorcade were given no opportunity to get in place to capture the image of the president greeting the crown prince upon his arrival at a palace here, a picture Mr. Biden's aides had dreaded. The Saudi government, for its part, made sure its official photographers were everywhere and snapped myriad shots of the two together, which were promptly posted online.

Mr. Biden is by nature a storyteller with a penchant for embellishment. He has often told the story of meeting President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia in 2011 as vice president and telling him, [“I’m looking into your eyes, and I don’t think you have a soul.”](#) Others present at the time had no memory of that specific exchange.

Mr. Biden has similarly described an unvarnished confrontation in 1993 with Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian nationalist leader who unleashed an ethnic war in the Balkans. [“I think you’re a damn war criminal and you should be tried as one.”](#) Mr. Biden, then a senator, related having told Mr. Milosevic, according to a 2007 memoir, “Promises to Keep.” Some other people in the room later said they did not recall that line.

Mr. Biden likes presenting himself as standing up to dictators and crooked figures. Another favorite story stemmed from a meeting with President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan in 2008, when the Afghan leader denied that his government was awash in corruption. Mr. Biden said he grew so irritated that he threw down his napkin, declared, [“This dinner is over.”](#) and stormed out.

Often, others in the room for such sessions say that some version of what Mr. Biden has described did take place, only not with quite as much camera-ready theatricality. During his presidential campaign, for instance, he told a moving story about honoring a war hero that fact checkers at The Post later concluded [conflated elements of three actual events](#) into a version that did not happen.

In offering their softer version of what transpired between Mr. Biden and Prince Mohammed on Friday, the Saudis were not seeking to call out the president for misrepresenting it. In fact, they seemed anxious to avoid any perception of differences or tension. Princess Reema bint Bandar al-Saud, the Saudi ambassador to the United States, told reporters that when it came to the Khashoggi case, the conversation “was candid.”

The question was, how candid?

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HEADLINE	07/16 Moscow signals aggressive shift in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/16/world/europe/russia-ukraine-donbas-shoigu-pause.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — In an indication that Russian forces were ending what they called an operational pause in their invasion of Ukraine, the defense minister of Russia, Sergei K. Shoigu, on Saturday ordered his forces to intensify attacks “in all operational sectors” of the war.</p> <p>As the Ukrainian government disclosed modest new ground attacks by Russian forces, the Russian defense ministry said in a statement that Mr. Shoigu had instructed that combat be intensified to stop Ukraine from shelling civilian areas in Russian-occupied territory.</p> <p>After deadly Russian missile strikes across Ukraine in recent days that killed civilians, the statement was a new signal from Moscow that its invasion may be entering a more aggressive phase.</p> <p>Mr. Shoigu’s statement appeared to be a response to Ukraine’s new ability to hit Russian targets in occupied areas due to more advanced, longer-range Western weapons, like the American HIMARS</p>

precision-guided rocket systems and the French Caesar artillery pieces. Ukraine claims to have hit at least 30 Russian ammunition and logistics sites with the new longer-range weapons in the last two weeks.

Earlier this month, the Russian president, Vladimir V. Putin, suggested to lawmakers that Russia would escalate the war. "Everyone should know that, by and large, we have not started anything seriously yet," Mr. Putin said.

There were signs of new ground fighting in the hotly contested Donbas region, where Russian forces have taken one of its provinces, Luhansk, and are trying to take the rest of another, Donetsk, as well. Ukrainian military and regional officials reported five probing attacks along the crescent-shaped frontline in the Donbas.

Ukrainian troops using "heavy fire" repelled a renewed overnight ground assault to capture the main road link between the cities of Lysychansk and Bakhmut, said Serhii Haidai, the military governor of Luhansk, an assertion echoed in a report on Saturday by Ukraine's general staff. The road has been bitterly contested for months.

The latest analysis by the Institute for the Study of War said Russian forces were "likely emerging from their operational pause," citing a series of limited ground assaults northwest of Sloviansk, southeast of Siversk, along the Bakhmut-Lysychansk highway and southwest of the city of Donetsk. "These assaults may indicate that Russian forces are attempting to resume their offensive operations in Donbas," the analysis said, while noting that "the assaults are still small-scale and were largely unsuccessful."

Some soldiers serving on frontline positions in the Donetsk region question whether the Russians ever actually paused, saying they have been under constant attack, on the ground and with artillery and aerial bombardment.

The sound of heavy explosions is often audible from the frontline cities of Sloviansk and Bakhmut. Smoke from fires dots the horizon south and east of Bakhmut, where Russian forces have been trying to advance.

A rocket hit a small fruit and vegetable market in Bakhmut on Friday afternoon, wounding several people. Early Saturday, three more rockets struck a factory and a house in Kostiantynivka, but without causing any casualties. "My café is broken, factories are smashed, everything is closed," said Vitaliy, 40, as he repaired the boards on his café windows the day after the blast. "There is nothing left. What will the people buy?"

In the early hours of Saturday, at least three civilians were killed and three more were injured in a Russian rocket strike on the northern Ukrainian city of Chuhuiv, about 75 miles from the Russian border, the regional police said.

In the neighboring Sumy region, one civilian was killed and at least seven more were injured after Russians opened mortar and artillery fire on three towns and villages not far from the Russian border, the regional governor said on Saturday.

In Donetsk, seven civilians were killed and 14 more injured, the regional governor said on Saturday.

The major strike came on Thursday, when a Russian submarine fired cruise missiles into the heart of Vinnytsia, a city of 370,000 people about 125 miles southwest of Kyiv, the capital.

Ukrainian officials said that strike killed at least 23 people, including a 4-year-old girl with Down syndrome, causing outrage in Ukraine and the West.

The Russian defense ministry said the strike on Vinnytsia was directed at a building where top officials from Ukraine's armed forces were meeting foreign arms suppliers. Ukrainian officials have denied that the building contained military targets.

The war is causing significant economic stress in the rest of the world, reducing global growth both this year and next, Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, told a hybrid meeting of Group of 20 finance ministers and heads of central banks.

“The war in Ukraine has intensified, exerting added pressures on commodity and food prices,” she said in a statement on Saturday. “Global financial conditions are tightening more than previously anticipated. And continuing pandemic-related disruptions and renewed bottlenecks in global supply chains are weighing on economic activity.”

Adding to the stress in Germany, which has been dependent on Russian energy, was a new statement by the Russian gas monopoly, Gazprom, urging the German company Siemens to return a turbine it has repaired in Canada to ensure the Nord Stream 1 pipeline delivering gas to Europe can resume working after a 10-day maintenance period that began on Monday.

Despite Western sanctions on Russia, Canada has agreed to grant what it has described as a time-limited and revocable permit for Siemens Canada to allow the turbine’s return. But Gazprom claims it has received no guarantees that the unit will be returned.

Germany was already coping with a 60 percent reduction in gas supplies through that pipeline, amid fears that Russia will not resume deliveries after maintenance. Conservative politicians have revived debate on extending the life of the country’s three remaining nuclear power plants, which produce about 6 percent of Germany’s electricity, a sensitive topic for the Greens, now in government. The plants are supposed to be shut down by the end of this year.

The European Union has banned the import of Russian coal, but a ban it imposed on oil imports is only gradual and partial. And there is no agreement on banning imports of natural gas. Brussels has also compromised on allowing Gazprom to be paid effectively in rubles, as Russia has demanded, with euro deposits into Gazprom’s own bank immediately shifted into rubles.

The European Union has also backed off on enforcing full sanctions on goods moving from mainland Russia to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea. The enclave is separated from the rest of Russia by Poland and Lithuania; Lithuania created tensions with Moscow by announcing that it would impose European Union sanctions on Russian goods traveling by train to Russian Kaliningrad through Lithuania.

After fierce Russian complaints, Brussels “updated” its guidelines and said that Russia would be allowed to transport civilian-use goods on the sanctions list through Lithuania by rail — though not by road — in amounts comparable to preinvasion deliveries over the last three years.

There can be targeted checks, Brussels said, to ensure that sanctioned military and dual-use goods and related technologies are not part of the rail shipments.

As Russia seeks more answers to counter the newer NATO mobile artillery systems, it has turned to Iran to explore buying that country’s sophisticated armed drones, the American national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said last week. On Saturday, a senior American official said that satellite images showed a Russian delegation visiting Iran to view unmanned weapons-capable drones that could be purchased for use in the war in Ukraine and that could be used to better target the new NATO artillery in counter-battery strikes.

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HEADLINE	07/16 Benton, Franklin counties ‘high’ level
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/new-cdc-rating-for-covid-in-tri-cities-means-thousands-of-workers-in-wa-must-wear-masks/
GIST	Both Benton and Franklin counties have new ratings of “high” for COVID-19 community levels from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It's the worst rating for the counties in recent months and up from ratings of "low" just a week ago.

The CDC recommends that people in the two counties wear masks indoors in public. The rating also triggers a requirement that workers at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and the Hanford nuclear reservation wear face masks.

Tests of wastewater for genetic material of the coronavirus also show a high level of the virus in the Tri-Cities. The total level announced Thursday exceeds the peak in cases over the past winter that were fueled by the original omicron variant.

Now transmission in much of the nation is being driven by the spread of the BA-5 variant, in addition to the BA-4 variant, of omicron.

Fewer people are being hospitalized than with the original omicron variant, but deaths continue to be reported.

The Benton Franklin Health District reported three recent deaths due to complications of COVID-19 in its weekly report Thursday, bringing the total reported since the start of the pandemic to more than 700.

Doctors in Washington state also are warning of the risk of long COVID, with lingering symptoms, for those who are infected.

In addition to recommending wearing masks indoors in public places for everyone in Benton and Franklin counties, the CDC says those at high risk of severe COVID-19 illness may need to take additional precautions.

They may want to avoid nonessential public indoor activities, have a plan for rapid testing and talk to their doctor about whether they are a candidate for treatments, including preventive treatments, according to the CDC.

In the coming week at the Hanford nuclear reservation, which employs about 11,000 people, masks are required indoors regardless of vaccination status, but with exceptions such as when an individual is alone in an office with the door shut.

Tours of the Hanford B Reactor, part of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park, have been canceled until the CDC rating drops.

At PNNL — which employs 5,350 people, the majority of them at its Richland campus — face coverings are required indoors, with some exceptions, for the coming week. Employees who have not been vaccinated must provide a negative test result and physically distance.

Benton and Franklin counties are among 14 in the state with a CDC rating of "high." Twenty counties have ratings of "medium" and just five now have ratings of "low."

Across the nation 25% of counties have "low" community levels of COVID-19, 40% have "medium" levels and 35% have "high" levels, according to the CDC.

The CDC rates counties based on the number of new COVID-19 cases, hospital beds used by patients with COVID and hospital admissions for people with the disease.

Tri-Cities COVID deaths

The three newly announced COVID-19 deaths were all residents of Benton County.

They included a woman in her 90s, and men in their 70s and 80s.

The Benton Franklin Health District reports recent deaths once a week, usually on a Thursday. Last Thursday five deaths were reported bringing the total for the month to date to eight.

July is on track to exceed the number of COVID-19 deaths reported in recent months. Seven to nine deaths were reported each of the past three months.

The deaths reported Thursday bring total COVID-19 deaths since the start of the pandemic to 701, including 485 residents of Benton County and 216 residents of Franklin County.

In the Tri-Cities, local public health officials verify that deaths are due to COVID complications by checking for a positive test result and that a coronavirus infection was named as a primary cause of death on the death certificate.

It can take several weeks for the district to receive and reconcile death information due to the reporting processes of medical facilities and coroner offices and the process of issuing and releasing death certificates.

Statewide, 13,434 residents have died of complications of COVID since the start of the pandemic, including 100 in the past week, according to data from the Washington state Department of Health.

Tri-Cities COVID cases

The new COVID case rate for the Tri-Cities was slightly down from earlier in the month, but higher than in June.

The Benton Franklin Health District on Thursday reported a new case rate for Benton and Franklin counties combined of 144 new cases per 100,000 people over a week. Case rates for the individual counties were about the same.

However, public health officials are looking to other metrics as home testing for COVID-19 increases in popularity and those test results usually are not reported for inclusion in new case rate data.

The concentration of genetic material from the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 in Tri-Cities wastewater was the highest this past week since testing began in late fall.

Concentrations surpassed the winter peak of COVID-19 caused by the original omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Untreated wastewater is collected from the municipal plants for Kennewick, Pasco, Richland and West Richland for testing.

Hospitals in Benton and Franklin counties are treating a total of about 26 patients for COVID-19 a week, which has held steady for July so far, but is above June levels.

Dr. Jeff Duchin, the health officer for Public Health — Seattle and King County, says the CDC has estimated that as of a couple weeks ago 65% to 95% of new COVID-19 cases in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska were caused by the new BA-5 subvariant of the omicron variant and to a lesser extent the new BA-4 subvariant.

Long COVID

The BA-5 subvariant is better at dodging people's immunity both from previous COVID-19 infections and from vaccination.

"This means it is very easy for people who previously had COVID to get sick again," he said at a news media briefing Thursday.

COVID-19 vaccination still provides protection against hospitalization and death, but boosters are important, especially for older people and those with underlying health conditions, he said.

“The most important piece of advice I can give you to keep you safer from COVID-19 is to be vaccinated and get your booster when eligible,” he said.

Even mild infections are worth preventing because each infection brings new risk for long COVID and other health problems, Duchin said.

Long COVID is defined as any new, returning or ongoing health problem four weeks or more after an initial COVID-19 infection.

Symptoms can last weeks, months, or in some cases years, he said.

Although long COVID is more likely in people who have severe initial cases, it also occurs in people who had mild or no symptoms.

Research suggests that being vaccinated lowers, but does not eliminate, the risk of long COVID, he said.

Some of the most common symptoms of long COVID are fatigue, brain fog, and blood pressure and heart rate issues that can leave people light headed or with a headache. Sleep problems also are common.

The UW Medicine clinic for post COVID-19 rehabilitation and recovery at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle sees long COVID patients of all walks of life and of all ages, including teens, said Dr. Janna Friedly, at the Thursday news briefing. They include people who were previously very healthy.

“COVID is like lighter fluid,” she said. “It just sets everything on fire.”

The General Accountability Office estimated in March that 7.7 million to 23 million people in the United States had developed long COVID.

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HEADLINE	07/16 Covid level ‘high’ in King Co.
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/covid-level-high-in-king-county-cdc-recommends-masks/
GIST	<p>COVID transmission is at a “high” level in King County, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which now recommends masks indoors regardless of vaccination status.</p> <p>But the public health department in King County, which said Thursday it is considering reinstating a mask mandate, puts the local transmission level slightly lower, based on a more refined set of data.</p> <p>The CDC calculates its transmission levels based on three factors: new COVID-19 cases in the last week, new COVID-19 hospital admissions in the last week and percent of hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients.</p> <p>King County has 328 COVID cases, per 100,000 population and 10.1 new admissions per 100,000, according to the CDC. But King County’s own data dashboard, shows lower numbers, with 5.9 new hospital admissions per 100,000, a figure that would classify as “medium” transmission by the CDC’s thresholds.</p> <p>“Our local hospital rate at any given point may differ from CDC’s because our data quality team removes cases among people who are hospitalized for other reasons, but also have COVID,” James Apa, a spokesperson for Public Health — Seattle & King County said.</p> <p>According to the CDC, King County is one of 14 Washington counties with high levels of COVID transmission.</p>

Snohomish, Skagit, Thurston, Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia, Adams, Lincoln and Spokane counties also have high levels of transmission.

King County health officials said Thursday that they are [“actively considering” the return of a mask mandate](#) in the county, as transmission levels are now higher than at the peak of last summer’s delta wave, but still much lower than last winter’s omicron wave.

King County — and the entire state of Washington — were [last under a mask mandate in March](#). Gov. Jay Inslee rescinded it as the omicron wave began to wane. King County’s transmission level at the time was low, by the CDC’s standards.

But the recent rise in transmission nationwide has spurred some jurisdictions to bring back mandates. Los Angeles announced this week that [it will reimplement a mask mandate](#) unless transmission numbers fall in the next two weeks. San Diego has brought back a [mask mandate for its public schools](#).

Public health leaders in Washington hope people will voluntarily move toward more cautious behavior, like indoor masking, negating the need for more mandates.

“Please, let’s make sure we’ve done all we can on a voluntary basis before we have to go there,” county health officer Dr. Jeff Duchin said Thursday. “We’re not going to be able to have an infinite series of mandates forcing people to do this, that, and the other.”

The higher level of transmission is [fueled by the BA.5 omicron subvariant](#) — along with BA.4 the most transmissible form of the virus yet — now the dominant form of the virus in the country.

Health officials continue to urge vaccination and booster shots. Vaccines are free and health insurance is not required.

“The COVID-19 pandemic with the rapid evolution of new variants is challenging us in new ways we did not anticipate, and it requires long-term sustained prevention strategies,” Duchin said. “It’s critical to understand that complacency is not the cure.”

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HEADLINE	07/16 US dollar strong, pushing down the world
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/07/16/business/strong-dollar.html
GIST	<p>The value of the U.S. dollar is the strongest it has been in a generation, devaluing currencies around the world and unsettling the outlook for the global economy as it upends everything from the cost of a vacation abroad to the profitability of multinational companies.</p> <p>The dollar lubricates the global economy. It is one side of about 90 percent of all foreign exchange transactions, accounting for \$6 trillion in activity every day before the pandemic, from tourists using their credit cards to companies making major international investments.</p> <p>As the world’s most important currency, the dollar often rises in times of turmoil, in part because investors consider it to be relatively safe and stable. Its performance is often seen as a marker of global economic health: The dollar has gained in recent months as inflation has soared, interest rates have increased and the outlook for growth has worsened. “That’s a pretty tough mix,” said Kamakshya Trivedi, co-head of a market research group at Goldman Sachs.</p> <p>The main way to gauge the dollar’s strength is by indexing it against a basket of currencies of major trading partners like Japan and the eurozone. By that measure, the dollar is at a 20-year high, after gaining more than 10 percent this year, a huge move for an index that typically shifts by tiny fractions each day.</p>

In the past week, the yen sank to a 24-year low against the dollar and the euro fell to parity, a [one-for-one exchange rate](#), with the dollar for the first time since 2002. But pick just about any currency — the Colombian peso or the Indian rupee, the Polish zloty or the South African rand — and it has probably lost value against the dollar, especially over the past six months or so.

“It’s a very, very strong dollar,” said Mark Sobel, a former U.S. Treasury official who now serves as the U.S. chair of the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum, a think tank. Broadly speaking, the dollar has been stronger on only three occasions since the 1960s.

The factors roiling the global economy partly explain why the dollar has suddenly become so much stronger.

As central bankers around the world try to tame inflation by raising interest rates, the Federal Reserve is moving more quickly and more aggressively than most. As a result, interest rates are now markedly higher in the United States than they are in many other large economies, luring investors attracted by the higher returns on even relatively conservative investments such as Treasury bonds. As money has poured in, the value of the dollar has increased.

Analysts at Bank of America estimated that more than half the rise in the dollar this year could be explained by the Fed’s comparatively aggressive policy alone.

The analysts cited its status as a haven in times of worsening economic conditions and stock market turmoil. They also said the dollar was rising because high energy prices were hitting the economies of importers, like most of Europe, harder than the United States, which is less reliant on buying oil and gas from abroad.

“This is a perfect setup for the dollar,” said Calvin Tse, a markets strategist at BNP Paribas. “Not only are recessionary fears rising but the U.S. also looks better off than the rest of the world.”

While a stronger dollar can be a mixed blessing for people and companies, such a sharp, quick move in the value of the world’s most widely used currency can have a destabilizing effect of its own.

Americans traveling abroad this summer will find that their money goes further. “One of the only ways an American can reap the rewards of a strong dollar is by going on holiday,” said Max Gokhman, the chief investment officer at AlphaTrAI, an asset management firm. “But even then, the airfare is going to be much more expensive because of the rise in oil prices.”

Companies based outside the United States have seen their sales bolstered by the strong dollar. Burberry, the British luxury goods maker, said on Friday that it would add more than \$200 million to its revenue this year because of movements in the currency — helping to offset a decline in sales in China, where the economy is slowing.

But U.S. companies with large international operations are taking a hit when they convert foreign sales back into dollars. Profits at both Microsoft and Nike, for example, have recently eroded. Apple generates more than 60 percent of its sales outside the United States; it and other tech giants, which dominate many stock indexes, are likely to suffer from the dollar’s strength when they reveal their next batch of financial reports in the coming weeks.

Ben Laidler, global markets strategist at eToro, estimates that the rise in the dollar will shave 5 percent off the earnings growth of S&P 500 companies this year, or roughly \$100 billion. That’s a sizable impact given that earnings among S&P 500 companies are forecast to grow around 10 percent this year, according to FactSet.

Reflecting the drag, companies that generate most of their revenue in the United States have performed better than rivals with more international exposure, according to indexes compiled by S&P Dow Jones Indices.

Many companies and governments abroad borrow in dollars, and the currency's strength is a big problem. This is particularly true for poorer countries attracted to dollar-denominated debt as an alternative to less developed local markets. As John B. Connally, a former Treasury secretary, famously told his counterparts at a summit in the early 1970s, "The dollar is our currency, but it's your problem."

Likely to be most affected are countries where dollar debt represents a large portion of a country's gross domestic product. Paying interest to creditors in dollars has become particularly difficult for countries with rapidly depreciating currencies like Argentina and Turkey, especially as interest rates on any new debt will also go up. In some cases, including for [Sri Lanka](#), it has become seemingly impossible.

The dollar, however, has not beaten every currency this year. The rise in energy and food prices, which accelerated after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has been a boon for the currencies of countries like Angola, a major oil producer; Uruguay, a major food exporter; and Brazil, which sells a lot of energy and agricultural commodities.

The Russian ruble, [perhaps surprisingly](#), has been one of the best-performing currencies against the dollar this year. High oil and gas prices, as well as capital controls imposed by Russia to keep money inside the country, have propped up the official exchange rate. What little ruble-dollar exchanges that ordinary Russians are able to make are likely at [a weaker rate](#).

Can the buck be stopped? Few analysts are betting that its strength will subside soon, even after such a remarkable run. The U.S. economy is looking shakier, but as Europe faces an energy crisis, Japan resists raising interest rates, China's Covid-19 lockdown policies snarl its supply chains and other countries teeter under the weight of high inflation, demand for the dollar looks robust. Though it remains unclear how long.

"For now, we still expect the dollar to trade on the front foot," said Mr. Trivedi of Goldman Sachs. "There might be a bit more to go, but probably the largest part of the dollar move may well be behind us."

The Bank of America analysts noted that they were "struck by our investor conversations focusing on what could lead to a peak" in the dollar's value, "as opposed to what takes it another 10 percent stronger."

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HEADLINE	07/16 Economies imperiled by force of pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/16/business/global-recession-risk.html
GIST	<p>This past week brought home the magnitude of the overlapping crises assailing the global economy, intensifying fears of recession, job losses, hunger and a plunge on stock markets.</p> <p>At the root of this torment is a force so elemental that it has almost ceased to warrant mention — the pandemic. That force is far from spent, confronting policymakers with grave uncertainty. Their policy tools are better suited for more typical downturns, not a rare combination of diminishing economic growth and soaring prices.</p> <p>Major economies including the United States and France reported their latest data on inflation, revealing that prices on a vast range of goods rose faster in June than anytime in four decades.</p> <p>Those grim numbers increased the likelihood that central banks would move even more aggressively to raise interest rates as a means of slowing price increases — a course expected to cost jobs, batter financial markets and threaten poor countries with debt crises.</p> <p>On Friday, China reported that its economy, the world's second-largest, expanded by a mere 0.4 percent from April through June compared with the same period last year. That performance — astonishingly anemic by the standards of recent decades — endangered prospects for scores of countries that trade</p>

heavily with China, including the United States. It reinforced the realization that the global economy has lost a vital engine.

The specter of slowing economic growth combined with rising prices has even revived a dreaded word that was a regular part of the vernacular in the 1970s, the last time the world suffered similar problems: stagflation.

Most of the challenges tearing at the global economy were set in motion by the world's reaction to the spread of Covid-19 and its attendant economic shock, even as they have been worsened by the latest upheaval — Russia's disastrous attack on Ukraine, which has diminished the supply of food, fertilizer and energy.

“The pandemic itself disrupted not only the production and transportation of goods, which was the original front of inflation, but also how and where we work, how and where we educate our children, global migration patterns,” said Julia Coronado, an economist at the University of Texas at Austin, speaking this past week during a discussion convened by the Brookings Institution in Washington. “Pretty much everything in our lives has been disrupted by the pandemic, and then we layer on to that a war in Ukraine.”

It was the pandemic that prompted governments to impose lockdowns to limit its spread, hindering factories from China to Germany to Mexico. When people confined to home then ordered record volumes of goods — exercise equipment, kitchen appliances, electronics — that overwhelmed the capacity to make and ship them, yielding the [Great Supply Chain Disruption](#).

The resulting scarcity of products pushed prices up. Companies in highly concentrated industries from [meat production](#) to [shipping](#) exploited their market dominance to rack up record profits.

The pandemic prompted governments from the United States to Europe to unleash trillions of dollars in emergency spending to limit joblessness and bankruptcy. Many economists now argue that they did too much, stimulating spending power to the point of stoking inflation, while the Federal Reserve waited too long to raise interest rates.

Now playing catch-up, central banks like the Fed have moved assertively, lifting rates at a rapid clip to try to snuff out inflation, even while fueling worries that they could set off a [recession](#).

Given the mishmash of conflicting indicators found in the American economy, the severity of any slowdown is difficult to predict. The [unemployment rate](#) — 3.6 percent in June — is at its lowest point in almost half a century.

But anxiety over rising prices and a recent slowing of spending by [American consumers](#) have enhanced fears of a downturn. This past week, the International Monetary Fund cited weaker consumer spending in [slashing](#) expectations for economic growth this year in the United States, from 2.9 percent to 2.3 percent. Avoiding recession will be “increasingly challenging,” the fund warned.

The pandemic is also at the center of the explanation for China's unnerving economic slowdown, which will probably extend shortages of industrial goods while limiting the appetite for exports around the world, from auto parts made in Thailand to soybeans harvested in Brazil.

China's zero-Covid policy has been accompanied by [Orwellian lockdowns](#) that have constrained business and life in general. The government expresses resolve in maintaining lockdowns, now affecting 247 million people in 31 cities that collectively produce \$4.3 trillion in annual economic activity, according to a recent estimate from Nomura, the Japanese securities firm.

But the endurance of Beijing's stance — its willingness to continue riding out the [economic damage](#) and [public anger](#) — constitutes one of the more consequential variables in a world brimming with uncertainty.

Russia's offensive in Ukraine has amplified the turmoil. International [sanctions](#) have restricted sales of Russia's enormous stocks of oil and natural gas in an effort to pressure the country's strongman leader, Vladimir V. Putin, to relent. The resulting hit to the global supply has sent energy prices soaring.

The price of a barrel of Brent crude oil rose by nearly a third in the first three months after the invasion, though recent weeks have seen [a reversal](#) on the assumption that weaker economic growth will translate into less demand.

Germany, Europe's largest economy, relies on Russia for nearly a third of its natural gas. When a [major pipeline](#) carrying gas from Russia to Germany cut the supply sharply last month, that heightened fears that Berlin could soon ration energy consumption. That would have a [chilling effect on German industry](#) just as it contends with supply chain problems and the loss of exports to China.

If Germany loses complete access to Russian gas — a looming possibility — it would almost certainly descend into a recession, say economists. The same fate threatens the continent.

"For Europe, the risk of a recession is real," Oxford Economics, a research firm in Britain, declared in a report this past week.

For the European Central Bank — which next gathers on Thursday to much apprehension in markets — the prospect of a downturn further complicates an already wrenching set of decisions.

Ordinarily, a central bank ministering to an economy sliding toward recession lowers interest rates to make credit more available, spurring borrowing, spending, and hiring. But Europe is confronting not only weakening growth but also soaring prices, which customarily calls for lifting rates to snuff out spending.

Raising rates would support the [euro](#), which has surrendered more than 10 percent of its value against the dollar this year, but also raise the cost of imports in the 19 nations that use the currency — another driver of inflation.

Adding to the complexity is that the usual central banking tool kit is not built for this situation. Navigating the balance between protecting jobs and choking off inflation is difficult enough in simpler times. In this case, rising prices are a global phenomenon, one amplified by a war so far impervious to sanctions and diplomacy, combined with the mother of all supply chain tangles.

Neither the Fed nor the European Central Bank has a lever to pull that forces action from Mr. Putin. Neither has a way to clear the backlog of container ships clogging [ports](#) from the United States to Europe to China.

"Everyone following the economic situation right now, including central banks, we do not have a clear answer on how to deal with this situation," said Kjersti Haugland, chief economist at DNB Markets, an investment bank in Norway. "You have a lot of things going on at the same time."

The most profound danger is bearing down on [poor and middle-income countries](#), especially those grappling with large debt burdens, like Pakistan, Ghana and El Salvador.

As central banks have tightened credit in wealthy nations, they have spurred investors to abandon developing countries, where risks are greater, instead taking refuge in rock-solid assets like U.S. and German government bonds, now paying slightly higher rates of interest.

This exodus of cash has increased borrowing costs for countries from sub-Saharan Africa to South Asia. Their governments face pressure to cut spending as they send debt payments to creditors in New York, London and Beijing — even as [poverty increases](#).

The outflow of funds has pushed down the value of currencies from South Africa to Indonesia to Thailand, forcing households and businesses to pay more for key imports like food and fuel.

The war in Ukraine has intensified all of these perils.

Russia and Ukraine are substantial exporters of grains and fertilizers. From Egypt to Laos, countries that traditionally depend on their supplies for wheat have suffered soaring costs for staples like bread.

Around the globe, the ranks of those considered “acutely food insecure” have more than doubled since the pandemic began, rising to 276 million people from 135 million, the [U.N. World Food Program](#) declared this month.

Among the biggest variables that will determine what comes next is the one that started all the trouble — the pandemic.

The return of colder weather in northern countries could bring another wave of contagion, especially given the [lopsided distribution of Covid vaccines](#), which has left much of humanity vulnerable, risking the emergence of new variants.

So long as Covid-19 remains a threat, it will discourage some people from working in offices and dining in nearby restaurants. It will dissuade some from getting on airplanes, sleeping in hotel rooms, or sitting in theaters.

Since the world was first seized by the public health catastrophe more than two years ago, it has been a truism that the ultimate threat to the economy is the pandemic itself. Even as policymakers now focus on inflation, malnutrition, recession and a war with no end in sight, that observation retains currency.

“We are still struggling with the pandemic,” said Ms. Haugland, the DNB Markets economist. “We cannot afford to just look away from that being a risk factor.”

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HEADLINE	07/16 Europe heat wave threatens tourism revival
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/european-heat-wave-kills-hundreds-threatens-tourism-revival?ref=home
GIST	<p>Extreme temperatures and devastating droughts across Europe are quickly turning what was supposed to finally be a return to normalcy for the region’s tourist entities into an inferno.</p> <p>More than 360 people have died in Spain since July 10 in an historic heat wave that has seen temperatures hover around 115 degrees for several days in a row. At least 84 of the deaths have occurred in the last 72 hours, prompting the Spanish government to urge people to limit exposure to the heat and ban some tourist activities like guided walks in Barcelona during the midday hours.</p> <p>At the Madrid Zoo, several cold-water reptiles have perished, and zookeepers are giving popsicles to many creatures that are refusing to eat due to the extreme conditions that are not expected to let up before the end of the month. Spain already endured an early summer heat wave with 829 people dying between June 11 and 20. Temperatures this time around are expected to be at least two degrees higher.</p> <p>In Portugal, more than 235 people have died this month from heat-related causes, and temperatures have continued to climb. Wildfires across the regions have led to the evacuation of several tourist camping and outdoor recreational areas that were booked for the entire summer, sending the travel industry into chaos, according to the government.</p> <p>The Italian government has called a national emergency along the River Po, which cuts across northern Italy and is so low people can walk across it at certain points. The drought has also led to extreme water restrictions, including turning off ornamental fountains in Milan and restricting hair dressers from double shampooing clients to save water. In southern Italy, droughts have sparked wildfires, including several devastating blazes within Rome’s city limits in the last two weeks.</p>

	<p>In the U.K., where summers are often disappointingly gray and air conditioning is rare, people were told to avoid alcohol and stay inside over the weekend as temps there are set to top 104 degrees. The Met Office issued a red warning for London, Manchester and York until Tuesday, warning that Britons “are not adapted to what is coming.”</p> <p>The never-before-used weather red alert signals a danger to life or risk of serious illness to the general population due to extreme heat. “Population-wide adverse health effects are likely to be experienced, not limited to those most vulnerable to extreme heat, leading to potential serious illness or danger to life,” the Met Office said in a statement Saturday. “Significantly more people are likely to visit coastal areas, lakes and rivers leading to increased risk of water safety incidents.”</p> <p>Fires are also raging across the South of France and Greek islands, complicating travel and isolating some of the region’s beloved summer getaway spots.</p> <p>National weather agencies across the affected region warn that it may be another week before temperatures start to return to normal.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/16 Facing two pandemics: Covid, monkeypox?
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/shocking-monkeypox-screw-up-means-we-need-to-admit-we-now-face-two-pandemics?ref=home
GIST	<p>We blew our chance to quickly contain monkeypox. Now the dangerous virus is spreading fast all over the world.</p> <p>Health experts agree: the outbreak could soon qualify as a pandemic, if it doesn’t already. And the situation is likely to get worse before it gets better. More infections, more deaths, more chances for the pox to mutate.</p> <p>“We are in uncharted territory with this outbreak... and still early in the event,” James Lawler, an infectious disease expert and a colleague of Wiley at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, told The Daily Beast.</p> <p>The latest figures from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control are startling. The CDC tallied 9,647 infections as of July 11. That’s a fourfold increase compared to just a month ago.</p> <p>The virus, which causes a rash and fever and can be fatal in a very small percentage of cases, is in 63 countries—57 of which don’t usually have <i>any</i> monkeypox cases.</p> <p>Cases are concentrated in West and Central Africa—where the virus is endemic—as well as in Europe, where the current outbreak began in May. But the U.S. is logging a startling number of cases, as well: 865 in 39 states, according to the CDC. That’s five times as many as a month ago.</p> <p>“Monkeypox is clearly a global health emergency,” Lawrence Gostin, a Georgetown University global-health expert, told The Daily Beast. “It has simmered in small pockets in Central and West Africa for decades, but until now there have been no cases unrelated to travel in the rest of the world. Now it is in virtually every region of the world and spreading rapidly.”</p> <p>The death rate, mercifully, is still low. As of July 4, the most recent date for which figures are available, the World Health Organization had recorded just three deaths in the current outbreak.</p> <p>Three out of 9,647—or .03 percent—is a much lower death rate than West and Central African countries apparently suffered in their own pox outbreaks in recent decades. The worst African outbreaks, involving a strain of the virus that’s endemic to the Congo River Basin in Central Africa, have resulted in official death rates as high as 10 percent.</p>

But the more viruses spread, the more they mutate—often in ways that make them deadlier. As long as monkeypox spreads faster than health authorities can contain it, the greater the risk it’s going to spawn new, more dangerous variants, potentially driving up the death toll.

Monkeypox mostly spreads through close physical contact, especially sexual contact. [It’s not a sexually transmitted disease, however](#). It just takes advantage of the skin-to-skin contact that accompanies sex. The virus can also travel short distances on spittle, although probably not far enough to qualify as “airborne.”

Officials first noticed the current outbreak, involving a relatively mild West African strain of the pox, after diagnosing a U.K. traveler returning from Nigeria in early May. Hitching a ride to Europe, the virus spread quickly through physical contact.

David Heymann, who formerly headed the WHO’s emergencies department, [said](#) that men attending raves in Spain and Belgium “amplified” the outbreak—apparently through close, sometimes sexual, contact with other men.

After that, the virus accompanied travelers on planes heading for countries far and wide. Doctors diagnosed the first U.S. case on May 27.

But it’s apparent now that the first *diagnosed* pox cases in Europe and the U.S. weren’t the real first cases. On June 3, the CDC [announced](#) it had found genetic evidence of U.S. pox cases that predated the first cases in Europe from May.

Doctors may not have noticed or reported these earlier cases, at first, owing to the similarity between pox symptoms and the symptoms of some common sexually transmitted diseases such as herpes. In other words, the current outbreak began, and expanded, without anyone noticing at first.

The virus had a big head start, which helps to explain why, months later, it still has the advantage. “By the time we recognized that cases were happening, we were already behind,” Lawler said.

Prompt diagnosis is the key to containing a dangerous virus quickly. If officials know where the virus is concentrated in the early days of an outbreak, they can isolate infected people, conduct contact-tracing to identify vulnerable populations and deploy therapies and vaccines and to treat the infected and protect the uninfected. (Lucky for us, widely available smallpox vaccines work just fine against monkeypox.)

With its likeliest infection vectors cut off by early intervention, the virus withers and disappears—*before* it can mutate into some new variant that might, say, be more contagious or even evade vaccines.

That’s what should have happened back in April or even earlier, but *didn’t* because the WHO, CDC and other health organizations didn’t even know a pox outbreak was happening. The current, rapid spread is the consequence of that initial failure.

The worst outcome isn’t hard to imagine—10,000 cases could quickly bloom into 100,000 cases. Then 1 million. Various experts and agencies disagree over the precise definition of “pandemic,” but if the pox outbreak doesn’t already qualify, it’s increasingly likely that it will in the weeks to come. At that point, the world will be contending with simultaneous pandemics.

The WHO for one has studiously avoided using the p-word to describe the pox outbreak. The CDC did not immediately respond to a query

This is a mistake, Lawler said. “We certainly cannot make ‘pandemic’ declarations about every disease outbreak that crosses multiple international borders without becoming the boy who cries wolf,” he conceded.

But, he added, “I would argue that we should have learned some humility in the face of emerging viruses by now.” If the word “pandemic” gets people’s attention and underscores the growing risk—use it.

The silver lining is the very low death rate in the current pox outbreak. That could be a statistical anomaly resulting from a huge overcount of deaths in earlier African outbreaks. “I am not sure we have a full grasp of the denominator of cases that actually occur in West Africa,” Lawler pointed out. Meaning, it’s possible that pox deaths in Africa were spread out across a much bigger number of infections than we realized at the time.

It’s also possible we’re seeing a happy side-effect of a pox outbreak mostly affecting richer communities. “Monkeypox is now being diagnosed in urban populations where more people have access to health-care facilities,” Blossom Damania, a virologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, told The Daily Beast.

Either way, we shouldn’t get complacent. The pox, like all viruses, treats every infected person like a laboratory. A chance to try new things, learn and change. Every additional infection increases the likelihood of new variants emerging. As COVID has repeatedly demonstrated, new variants mean new risks. Greater transmissibility, severity or vaccine-evasion—or a mix of all three.

There’s still time to prevent the worst-case scenario of millions of cases and potentially thousands of deaths. The WHO, CDC and other health bodies must double down on efforts to educate doctors and speed up diagnoses—and then move more quickly to isolate and treat infected people and vaccinate those around them. “If we can get enough vaccine into high-risk contacts, this will cease,” Amesh Adalja, a public-health expert at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, told The Daily Beast.

COVID reminded us how bad a viral outbreak can get. Then monkeypox came around to remind us of our strong tendency toward complacency, even amid an ongoing health crisis. “It is shocking that, after all we have learned with COVID-19, we have let another virus escalate to the point of becoming a global health emergency,” Gostin said.

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HEADLINE	07/15 Easier to get Covid outdoors with BA.5?
SOURCE	https://time.com/6198005/outdoor-transmission-ba5-covid-19/
GIST	<p>When the pandemic first began, COVID-19 seemed to lurk around every corner, so it came as a big relief when scientists established that the virus doesn’t easily spread outdoors. This summer, however, that feeling of relative safety has come into question. Now that the BA.5 subvariant is driving a new wave in the U.S., can people count on the open air to keep them safe?</p> <p>The truth is that being outside has never been a sure way to avoid COVID-19 transmission—especially at crowded events, like music festivals, which have been linked to outbreaks in the past. “We certainly hear, in our study, of people who pretty clearly were infected outdoors, so it happens,” says Dr. Donald Milton, professor of environmental health at the University of Maryland School of Public Health, who is principal investigator of an ongoing study on COVID-19 transmission. Of course, “it’s still a lower risk than indoors,” but Milton does not feel comfortable in every outdoor situation. “I didn’t go to the fireworks on July 4, and I have not been in any crowds,” he says. “My outdoor activities mostly consist of exercising, riding a bike, walking, and jogging.”</p> <p>BA.5 seems to evade immunity from vaccines and past infections more easily than past subvariants, which experts say increases risk no matter where you are. “We’re more susceptible hosts, and we’re more susceptible whether we’re inside or outside,” says Dr. Duane Wesemann, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and an immunologist at Brigham and Women’s Hospital.</p> <p>While scientists are still learning about BA.5, it’s increasingly clear that compared to past variants, it has advantages that help it bypass the immune system’s defenses. Like other Omicron subvariants, BA.5 has developed new mutations—in this case, in the spike protein, the part of the virus that binds to cells—which may help it to evade immunity, explains Bing Chen, an associate professor of medicine at Harvard</p>

	<p>Medical School and Boston Children’s Hospital who studies molecular medicine. “Our antibodies are a little less effective against BA.5 compared to BA.1 and Delta,” he says.</p> <p>BA.5’s increased transmission and our diminished immune defenses mean that COVID-19 transmission outdoors has become more likely. But that doesn’t mean that being outdoors isn’t going to provide some protection—especially if you also take other precautions. As always, context matters. Being in the open air and away from other people is safer than being in a crowd with worse air circulation—like in a packed baseball stadium without a breeze, says Milton. “Outdoors remains a much lower-risk setting than indoors,” says Linsey Marr, professor of civil and environmental engineering at Virginia Tech. “Transmission outdoors is most likely to occur in close, face-to-face conversation. There’s also the possibility of transmission if you happen to be close enough and downwind of someone who is infected.”</p> <p>The same precautions that keep you safe indoors can also help outside, including avoiding crowds and wearing a mask when you’re with other people. Being up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations can also make you safer, since the shots trigger the immune system to develop multiple types of defenses against COVID-19, says Wesemann. While the virus is increasingly good at getting around the neutralizing antibodies—which help prevent people from getting infected in the first place—vaccines also trigger longer-lasting types of immune responses. In the end, that means that vaccinated people who get infected with COVID-19 are less likely to become very sick or die from the disease—no matter where they were infected.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 US: Putin likely aware of brutal war crimes
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-07-15/putin-likely-aware-of-brutal-war-crimes-by-russian-forces-in-ukraine-diplomat-says
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin is almost certainly aware of the torture, rape, forced relocations and other war crimes that the U.S. and others assert his forces have carried out against civilians in Ukraine and will be held to account for them, a top American diplomat to Europe said Friday.</p> <p>“We want to signal that no one will be outside of the scope of the law,” Michael Carpenter, the U.S. ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, told reporters from his headquarters in Brussels on Friday morning. “Everyone will be held accountable.”</p> <p>Carpenter spoke a day after detailing to the OSCE the findings of a report that studied Russian military forces’ action in several Ukrainian cities from April to the end of June. Focusing on the cities of Bucha, Irpin and Mariupol, among others, it found particularly grievous indications of systematic torture and rape by Russian units that Putin later lauded for battlefield heroism.</p> <p>One example documented a makeshift torture chamber discovered at a former summer camp in Bucha with evidence of tools used to conduct waterboarding. The corpses of five men dressed in civilian clothing were discovered there with burns, bruises and other forms of lacerations. The report also documented that Russian troops in Bucha kept 25 girls aged 14-24 in a basement and gang-raped them.</p> <p>When asked whether these incidents were the result of orders from the Russian chain of command, potentially up to the Kremlin and Putin himself – rather than an isolated instance of a lack of proper military oversight – Carpenter said “one can assume that much of the Russian leadership should be aware of what is happening.”</p> <p>He noted Putin’s decision after reports of battlefield atrocities emerged to bestow the prestigious title of “guards” on the units that had operated in Bucha for their heroism and battlefield distinction in the Ukraine campaign.</p> <p>“It’s hard to see that at the time that this was done in April that the Russian leadership would be unaware of the allegations against those units in Bucha,” Carpenter said.</p>

Russia has denied the reports, and on Thursday a court in Moscow [jailed a Russian opposition figure](#) who helped disseminate some of the Bucha reports under strict new laws forbidding criticism of its “special military operation” in Ukraine.

Though Carpenter, members of the Biden administration and other Western officials have asserted that Russia will be held accountable for allegations of war crimes in Ukraine, it remains unclear specifically what avenue they will take – at the International Criminal Court or elsewhere – to follow through on the pledges.

The new OSCE report also highlights the Russian military’s employment of forcibly relocating Ukrainian civilians either elsewhere in Ukraine or into Russia – which the U.S. delegation says violates the Geneva Conventions. The tactic represents an apparent Russian strategy to replace populations with those loyal to Moscow and undermine potential insurgencies.

And Russia’s fears are well-founded. A Ukrainian army source speaking on the condition of anonymity told U.S. News about new assessments of a burgeoning partisan movement in Kherson, home to some of the bloodiest fighting in the war since Russia invaded on Feb. 24. It serves as one example of civilians waging an “armed struggle” against the occupiers, the source said.

Those assessments differ sharply from the civilian populations in the Donbas region, Ukraine’s industrial heartland in the far east which Russia first invaded in 2014. Comprising the descendants of ethnic Russians sent there during the Soviet era to work in the industrial communities, and now the focus of a concerted propaganda campaign, this population remains much more sympathetic to Moscow and the supposed “Russian peace” that Putin claims he wishes to institute.

British intelligence has similarly documented Russia’s forced relocation tactic, stating in a new assessment released Friday morning that more than 2.5 million Ukrainians have been “evacuated” from Ukraine to Russia.

“Russia continues to face accusations that it is forcibly deporting Ukrainians; in many cases Ukrainians have reportedly been mistreated in filtration camps set up by Russia,” the U.K. Ministry of Defense’s military intelligence stated.

Carpenter called the move “part of a concerted strategy” and “a patent attempt by Russia to engage in social engineering on the ground.”

Several regional experts compiled the new OSCE report after the U.S. delegation to the organization invoked a procedure known as the Moscow Mechanism – an agreement by all OSCE member states, including Russia, that allows at least one to ask of another permission for a special mission “to address a particular, clearly defined question on its territory relating to the human dimension.”

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HEADLINE	07/16 Cities, towns drawing skilled tech workers
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/tech-workers-silicon-valley-move-out-11657918928?mod=hp_lead_pos9
GIST	<p>A growing number of cities and towns all over the U.S. are handing out cash grants and other perks aimed at drawing skilled employees of faraway companies to live there and work remotely. A handful of such programs have existed for years, but they have started gaining traction during the pandemic—and have really taken off in just the past year or so. Back in October there were at least 24 such programs in the U.S. Today there are 71, according to the Indianapolis-based company MakeMyMove, which is contracted by cities and towns to set up such programs.</p> <p>Because these programs specifically target remote workers who have high wages, a disproportionate share of those who are taking advantage of them work in tech—and especially for big tech companies. Companies whose employees have participated in one remote worker incentive program in Tulsa, Okla., include Adobe, Airbnb, Amazon, Apple, Dell, Facebook parent Meta Platforms,</p>

Google, [IBM](#), [Microsoft](#), [Lyft](#), [Netflix](#), [Oracle](#) and [Siemens](#), according to a spokeswoman for the organization.

Local governments are offering people willing to move up to \$12,000 in cash, along with subsidized gym memberships, free babysitting and office space.

Because of the relatively modest scale of these economic-development programs, even small communities can get in on the game in a way they never could for, say, [the Amazon HQ2 extravaganza](#). Among the towns doing this is Greensburg, Ind., population 12,193.

A skeptic might ask why local economic development programs are spending funds to subsidize the lives of people who work for some of the most valuable companies in the world. On the other hand, because these remote workers aren't coming to town seeking local jobs, an argument can be made that they constitute a novel kind of stimulus program for parts of the country that have been left out of the tech boom—courtesy of big tech companies.

Some of those companies are perfectly happy with this turn of events. In April, Airbnb said nearly all of its employees could [work anywhere they liked](#), and retain their full salaries. It's even promoting its product as a way for remote workers to [find temporary housing](#), says a spokeswoman for the company.

Every remote worker these places successfully attract and retain is like gaining a fraction of a new factory or corporate office, with much less expenditure and risk, argues Mark Muro, who studies cities and labor at the Brookings Institution.

Where the wind comes sweepin' down the plain

Jason Mathew, who was born and raised in New York City, is a product manager at IBM who has lived in nearly every increasingly unaffordable tech hub in the country, including San Francisco and Austin. To his surprise, he's found Tulsa is where he belongs. "I've felt so loved and known here in ways I never have before," he says.

That sense of possibility, community and mission is something that Tulsa Remote, the privately funded program that brought Mr. Mathew to the city, seeks to promote. It's also what attracted David Gora, who works for the part of Meta that screens third-party developers to determine whether they should have access to its platform.

"To some degree, I've been able to find myself," says Mr. Gora, who before his move to the Midwest had never lived anywhere in the U.S. other than California. Other things he likes include the lack of a commute, the lower cost of living, and higher quality of life he's been able to find in Tulsa compared with the Silicon Valley city he used to live and work in for Meta.

Tulsa Remote started in 2018 with the mission of attracting remote workers, at a time when they represented only 3% of the U.S. workforce, says Justin Harlan, managing director of the program. By October 2021, with the pandemic having pushed 45% of full-time workers in the U.S. to work remotely at least part time, according to Gallup, many other cities and towns across America had decided to try their hand at attracting them.

Tulsa Remote, the biggest of these programs by the number of people it has brought in, has a distinct advantage over most: It's funded by the George Kaiser Family Foundation, a philanthropic organization based in and focused on Tulsa, which spent \$181 million on a variety of initiatives in 2020 alone. Almost all of America's comparable programs must be paid out of local economic-development budgets.

By the end of 2021, Tulsa Remote had brought 1,360 people to the city. By the end of 2022, the total could be more than 2,400.

From smokestacks to knowledge workers

“This is the new version of smokestack chasing,” says Roy Bahat, head of the Bloomberg Beta venture-capital firm and a former economic-development official for New York City. “Smokestack chasing” refers to local governments’ bidding against one another to try to attract a factory, office or some other kind of infrastructure that will create jobs. “It’s like what Ohio did when it attracted a microchip factory,” he adds, referring to the [more than \\$2 billion in incentives](#) the state promised [Intel](#) to convince the company to [locate its factory in the state](#).

A study conducted by the Economic Innovation Group and commissioned by Tulsa Remote concluded that for every two people the program brings to the city, [one new job is created](#).

By contrast, when an office moves to a town, every new high-wage tech job creates an estimated five more jobs in sectors including healthcare, education and service, according to [research by economist Enrico Moretti](#). That’s because those deals involve not only people but the money that goes into building and maintaining facilities, paying commercial property taxes and more.

Modest bets, modest impact

Still, for towns that don’t have the budget to attract a whole office or factory, the modest impact of bringing in a handful of remote tech workers can be balanced by the much smaller investment required to attract them.

Consider Doug Waltz. He is in many ways your typical Amazon engineer—well compensated, likes the perks and enjoys the flexibility of remote work, which has allowed him to be a devoted father during his children’s earliest years.

One way he’s atypical, however, is that as a newly minted resident of Greensburg, the Indiana town with around 12,000 people, he’s the only Amazon engineer in what he estimates is a 30 mile radius, at least. His basket of incentives to move to his new home included \$5,000 from the city, a year of free office space, gym membership and babysitting for his children, ages 1 and 3.

Greensburg’s program is tiny compared with Tulsa’s, and is only budgeted to attract a handful of remote workers a year.

Community and quality of life are critical

The remote workers I interviewed said that the incentives they were offered got them to consider the places they moved to, but weren’t what convinced them to move. For workers like Mr. Waltz, the desire to be closer to his wife’s family in the state was the deciding factor. For Mr. Mathew, the product manager at IBM, who is single but would like to start a family, it was the potential of Tulsa to be a place where he could build the life he envisions. And Mr. Gora decided to stay in Tulsa partly because his girlfriend recently moved in with him there.

Many other factors, such as inflation and America’s housing crisis, also matter. Mr. Gora now pays less for a three-bedroom house with a yard than he did for a one-bedroom apartment with no air conditioning or dishwasher in Santa Clara, Calif. Even with the pay cuts that Meta has imposed on workers who relocate to areas with a lower cost of living, Mr. Gora is saving a lot more money and has a much higher quality of life than before, he adds.

Since moving to Tulsa in 2020, Mr. Mathew has become a landlord of the four-unit apartment building where he lives, got voted vice president of his neighborhood community association and launched a side project in the form of a new startup and app.

“What is keeping me here is the opportunity,” he says. “And the people.”

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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-to-define-u-s-middle-east-vision-heavy-on-diplomacy-11657959946?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia—President Biden laid out his vision for the U.S. role in the Middle East Saturday, pledging to stay engaged in the region and strengthen relationships with Arab nations to counter the influence of China, Russia and Iran.</p> <p>“The United States is going to remain an active engaged partner in the Middle East as the world grows more competitive, and the challenges we face more complex,” Mr. Biden said in a 10-minute speech in this seaside town.</p> <p>“It’s only becoming clear to me how closely interwoven America’s interests are with the successes of the Middle East.”</p> <p>“We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia or Iran,” he added. He also repeated a pledge that the U.S. is committed to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.</p> <p>Mr. Biden said the U.S. would chart a new approach to the Middle East focused on diplomacy over aggression. “Today, I’m proud to be able to say that the era of land wars in the region, wars involving huge numbers of American forces, is not underway,” he said.</p> <p>The summit brought together leaders from Saudi Arabia and five other Persian Gulf countries that form the Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC, plus Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. It came a day after Mr. Biden met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman with a fist bump and then accusing him of involvement in journalist Jamal Khashoggi’s killing.</p> <p>The speech comes amid mounting concern about Washington’s commitment to the region, which was galvanized by the chaotic pullout from Afghanistan last summer. A central goal for the summit is countering Russia and China’s influence in the region and marshaling Arab nations against Iran, Biden administration officials said.</p> <p>White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said Saturday that the U.S. government had intelligence indicating that Russian officials visited the Kashan Airfield in central Iran in June and July to review the country’s attack-capable drones. The White House released satellite imagery that officials said documented the visit. CNN earlier reported on the new intelligence.</p> <p>Mr. Sullivan warned earlier this week that Iran was preparing to provide Russia with drones for the battlefield in Ukraine, as well as training for its forces to use them. U.S. officials say they hope their decision to publicly sound the alarm about their intelligence will resonate with Arab nations, which have raised concerns about Tehran’s advanced drone program. The U.S. and its partners and allies in the region have blamed the drone program for some of the attacks in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Middle East.</p> <p>Other issues discussed at the summit included loosening Iran’s grip on Iraq, economic issues and investments in infrastructure.</p> <p>Mr. Biden kicked off a series of bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the summit Saturday morning, meeting with the leaders of Iraq, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.</p> <p>As he met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, Mr. Biden thanked him for “incredible assistance” with Gaza and said he was looking forward to talking with him about a range of issues.</p> <p>An administration official said Mr. Biden raised the issue of human rights with Mr. Sisi. The Egyptian leader has jailed thousands of people since deposing the country’s elected president in 2013.</p> <p>According to an Egyptian readout of the meeting, Messrs. Biden and Sisi spoke about the global food crisis, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and an Ethiopian dam on the Nile River that has raised water security concerns in Cairo. It didn’t mention human rights.</p>

In a separate meeting, Mr. Biden extended an invitation to Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, president of the United Arab Emirates, to visit the U.S. Relations with the U.A.E. have been strained under the Biden administration, with Sheikh Mohammed [declining to take a call from the president](#) earlier this year.

Mr. Biden's signature Middle East diplomatic initiative has stalled, as the talks to revive a nuclear deal with Iran hit a dead end in recent months. In an interview with Israeli television, Mr. Biden said the U.S. would use force as a last resort to prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon.

Food security and climate issues were also part of the conversation at the summit, with the president announcing \$1 billion in food-security assistance to the Middle East and North Africa, officials said. The GCC leaders will also be announcing \$3 billion to partner with the U.S. on infrastructure investments.

On Friday, Mr. Biden met with Saudi leaders, including Prince Mohammed, in an [effort to reset relations](#) with a leader he once shunned, and prod the kingdom to help control oil prices and deepen its ties with Israel. He took a [rare direct flight from Israel](#) to the country nearly three years after promising [to treat the kingdom like a "pariah"](#) over human-rights issues.

Mr. Biden said he [confronted the crown prince](#) about Mr. Khashoggi's killing during the meeting. He said he raised the brutal 2018 dismemberment of Mr. Khashoggi at the beginning of the Friday meeting, saying: "I'll always stand up for our values."

Saudi officials cast the encounter as less confrontational, describing a candid exchange as a positive way forward. "All-weather friends," hailed English-language newspaper Saudi Gazette, above photos of the president's meetings with Saudi leaders.

The president had been under pressure to highlight human rights during the four-day trip to Israel and Saudi Arabia. Many in Washington, including in Mr. Biden's party, have criticized the visit to Saudi Arabia given the country's human-rights record and the killing of Mr. Khashoggi.

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HEADLINE	07/16 Ukraine: Starlink keeps forces connected
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-leans-on-elon-musks-starlink-in-fight-against-russia-11657963804?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>BARVINKOVE, Ukraine—Along much of the Ukraine-Russia front line, commercial cellphone towers providing voice and internet service have been knocked out by power outages, Russian shells and jamming.</p> <p>But Elon Musk's Starlink service, which provides internet connectivity using a swarm of satellites, is up and running here. Mr. Musk has sent thousands of kits into Ukraine, turning the country into a high-profile testing ground for the service, which he is trying to sell in other countries around the world.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials and officers at headquarters and in the field credit Starlink with keeping their forces connected.</p> <p>"Without Starlink, we would have been losing the war already," said one platoon commander on the Izyum front, where Russian forces are trying to push south to capture the Donbas region.</p> <p>Mr. Musk's move comes with reputational risks if the service doesn't live up to his billing. His intervention in the war on the side of Ukraine also risks drawing Moscow's ire and alienating governments friendly or fearful of Russia. Those could include markets where Starlink, owned by Mr. Musk's Space Exploration Technologies Corp., or SpaceX, might one day hope to compete.</p>

The company isn't the only Western business that has offered support for Ukraine following Russia's invasion: [Microsoft](#) Corp., for instance, said it has [helped Kyiv ward off cyberattacks](#).

Starlink's deployment in Ukraine has drawn particular praise from Ukrainian leaders. Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said in an interview that Starlink had been critical for communications between commanders and units in places where regular cellphone service is out. Mr. Reznikov said he recently sent a personal letter to Mr. Musk to thank him and explain that the country needs more Starlink gear.

"Starlink is a very, very good piece of equipment," Mr. Reznikov said. "It's not lethal, but it's really effective."

Unlike a fiber-optic connection, Starlink's portable satellite dishes communicate with a constellation of satellites that beam down the internet. The dish then sends out a Wi-Fi signal for nearby devices.

Like most satellite-internet systems, Starlink can't match the bandwidth of more traditional fiber-optic and cellular networks. It doesn't rely on cellphone towers or buried fiber lines, though, making it more robust in conflict zones. The service's compact and easy-to-move satellite dishes are also proving well suited for the backup internet needs of a crisis-hit country such as Ukraine.

SpaceX didn't respond to requests for comment. The Kremlin didn't respond to a request for comment. In May, Dmitry Rogozin, who at the time led Russia's space agency Roscosmos, said Mr. Musk would be "held responsible, like an adult" for enabling Ukraine's military communications.

Starlink, which SpaceX has been [developing over the past few years](#), is trying to build a large business selling high-speed internet connections powered by its growing fleet of low-orbit satellites. Mr. Musk has also said the revenue Starlink generates could fund SpaceX's broader ambitions, such as developing more advanced rockets and spacecraft.

The internet service had around 400,000 subscribers, according to a recent regulatory filing in the U.S. Several years ago, SpaceX envisioned having more than 40 million subscribers by 2025, [The Wall Street Journal](#) has [previously reported](#).

In May, Starlink was available in 32 countries, SpaceX said on [Twitter](#). The company said Thursday that regulators in Georgia authorized Starlink for use in the country.

Starlink's approach is similar to those of Britain's OneWeb and [Amazon.com](#) Inc., which plans to [roll out its low-orbit satellite network](#) over the next few years. The SpaceX business also competes with more established companies offering internet service using satellites stationed deeper into space such as [Viasat](#) Inc.

Before the war, SpaceX had been pushing to win regulatory approval in Ukraine, company executives have said. On Feb. 26, two days after Russia invaded, Ukraine's minister of digital transformation, Mykhailo Fedorov, tweeted at Mr. Musk, requesting Starlink terminals.

"Starlink service is now active in Ukraine. More terminals en route," Mr. Musk responded a few hours later. SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell told a conference in March the exchange provided a regulatory green light: "They tweeted at my boss, and that was our permission."

Apart from its role bolstering Ukraine's command and control on the battlefield, Starlink has helped officials quickly reconnect liberated towns to the internet. Coverage has allowed soldiers to stay in touch with loved ones. Thousands of Ukrainian troops cut off at a steel mill in the southeastern city of Mariupol used Starlink to send and publish online photos and videos chronicling their plight along with public and private messages to the outside world. They surrendered in May.

Some 15,000 Starlink user kits have been delivered to Ukraine, according to a SpaceX presentation Mr. Musk recently posted to Twitter. Kits include an outdoor-mounted circular or rectangular dish, about the

size of a carry-on bag, that connects with Starlink satellites. The dishes use that connection to provide Wi-Fi internet service to nearby devices.

The company typically charges \$599 a customer for Starlink hardware with a \$110 monthly fee. SpaceX has donated thousands of kits, as well as internet service, while the U.S. Agency for International Development and private companies have sponsored thousands more kits.

Starlink has also helped keep other businesses connected through the war. Telecom company Ukrtelecom JSC received about 30 Starlink terminals from the Ukrainian government in early March. The broadband provider used the satellite links to communicate with its own technicians in war-torn areas and to provide connections between its board of directors.

“We use these terminals as an emergency connection,” Ukrtelecom Chief Technical Officer Dmytro Mykytiuk said.

But Starlink has become crucial on the battlefield, Ukrainian officers say. At one outpost, north of Ukraine’s second-largest city of Kharkiv, the local Ukrainian army commander conferenced in on his iPhone a spotter on the roof of the building, a drone operator and an artillery team several miles away, trying to guide mortar rounds to Russian lines at the forest edge. Starlink enabled the connection.

In another compound in the same village, the password for the building’s Starlink terminal was written in big letters on the wall of the basement where troops rested between missions. They could log in any time to browse the news and catch up with their families.

Major cities on the front line such as Lysychansk and Severodonetsk in Donbas have been left without mobile-phone coverage since April. At the Ukrainian government compound in Lysychansk before city’s recent capture by Russian forces, Starlink provided the only secure means of communications with military units and civilian authorities. It was also offered to the public, with local residents going to the building to connect with their families in safer parts of Ukraine and to plot evacuations.

It is also helping to boost morale and dissipate boredom. During an artillery attack on their base near Izyum, in the Kharkiv region, in May, soldiers hunkering down in a school basement browsed on their phones and FaceTimed with their spouses on Starlink-enabled connections.

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HEADLINE	07/16 Smiles, unity at Pacific Islands Forum
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/16/smiles-and-unity-at-the-pacific-islands-forum-mask-tough-questions-shelved-for-another-day
GIST	<p>At the close of the Pacific Islands Forum the leaders emerged from their retreat smiling, cut a giant cake with a sword and then, in an impromptu moment of diplomatic bonhomie, posed for a selfie after Anthony Albanese whipped out his phone, Ellen DeGeneres style.</p> <p>It was, quite literally, a picture of harmony.</p> <p>“It’s been a very successful meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum,” said Albanese at his post-leaders’ retreat press conference. “We are family when it comes to the Pacific and there was a good spirit of cooperation and dialogue speaking about a common interest.”</p> <p>If the last in-person summit in Tuvalu was all about taking the climate fight to Australia, this year’s was all about Pacific unity – with the notable exception of Kiribati.</p> <p>The leaders of Tonga, Palau, Papua New Guinea and the vice-president of French Polynesia joined Albanese to watch the State of Origin, while Jacinda Ardern teased him about the result the next day.</p>

Even Manasseh Sogavare, the prime minister of [Solomon Islands](#), who has had some not so positive things to say about Australia in recent months after the signing of its security deal with China, greeted Albanese at the beginning of their bilateral meeting with a hug.

Albanese put the diplomatic good vibes down to the relief of Pacific leaders at [Australia's increased ambition on climate](#) change under his government. But while there is definitely optimism among leaders, one can't help thinking the big smiles were also a result of some vexatious questions facing the region being put on the shelf for another day.

Take coal. This will inevitably be a sticking point between Pacific countries and Australia, but apparently did not come up at all in discussions.

Albanese and [Penny Wong](#) were both asked if new coal and gas projects in the pipeline for approval in Australia were raised by Pacific leaders, and both said they weren't. Albanese refused to answer what justification he would give Pacific leaders about the fact that his government has not ruled out new coal and gas projects, saying it was a "hypothetical question".

"I was not asked about that," he said. "Not one person today raised such questions in the meeting, nor was it raised in any of the meetings I held."

But it will only be hypothetical for so long.

Pacific leaders have consistently told countries, including Australia, they must transition rapidly away from coal and commit to no new fossil fuel projects if the world is to meet its goal of keeping warming under 1.5C, which is needed for all Pacific Island countries to survive.

It was a big difference between this year's forum and the one in 2019, attended by Scott Morrison and hosted by Tuvalu – a low-lying atoll nation considered one of the most at-risk due to sea level rise.

Coal was brought up directly and repeatedly with Scott Morrison. Pacific Island leaders attempted to have commitments about transitioning away from coal power included in the communique, but Australia had those removed, which almost derailed the talks.

There were no such attempts this year. So why this shift in tone?

It's not that they have changed their stance on coal's place in a heating world. Frank Bainimarama, Fiji's prime minister, told journalists after the leaders' retreat that his country's "ask" of all countries, including Australia, was to end their "fossil fuel addiction, including coal".

Firstly, there is a feeling of genuine relief among Pacific leaders at the shift in tone and policy from the Australian government on climate change.

Australia is now singing from a climate songbook that more closely resembles that of Pacific Island leaders.

Secondly, there is a recognition that the Australian government is new and needs some time to find its feet before the Pacific really puts the pressure on to do more.

"Obviously they've been in office for about two months now, but the messaging that's coming from them is very positive. So we're hopeful that we can work on the issues that the Pacific is pushing for," said Simon Kofe, Tuvalu's foreign minister, on the sidelines of the forum.

But he agreed that if Australia were to approve new coal projects that would put them at odds with the rest of the region. "I mean, that's one of the issues that we were at odds with the previous government," he said.

Return to Top	<p>The other conversation that has been put off is China.</p> <p>Pacific leaders have demonstrated in recent months how important the Pacific Islands Forum bloc is when negotiating with the superpower. Pacific leaders were able to refuse the sweeping regional economic and security deal proposed by Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi in May, in large part because they were able to say that the issue needed to be discussed at the Pacific Islands Forum.</p> <p>Pacific countries have to walk a tricky line when it comes to China and this was an answer that gave them safety in numbers, while also showing China there is established regional architecture that needs to be respected.</p> <p>Typically at the Pacific Islands Forum each year there is a meeting on the day after the leaders' retreat at which partner countries like China, the US and Japan can give presentations.</p> <p>It was widely expected that China would use that meeting to reintroduce their regional deal, but that partners' meeting was postponed for later in the year at a date yet to be decided.</p> <p>Incidentally, the fact that the partners' dialogue was cancelled but that US vice-president Kamala Harris, was given a chance to speak virtually to leaders and China is significant.</p> <p>The president of the Federated States of Micronesia, David Panuelo told the Guardian that the postponement of the partners' meeting was about giving leaders some breathing room from the intense geopolitical tension.</p> <p>But it is a discussion deferred rather than dealt with.</p> <p>Pacific leaders will still meet with China later this year, at a post-forum event and they will still have to decide what to do about China's amended regional deal.</p> <p>So while leaders may be basking in the glow of a friendly and successful forum, there are some tough conversations that have been kicked down the road.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 Evacuations as heat causes wildfires
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/15/thousands-evacuated-as-heat-causes-wildfires-in-europe-and-north-africa
GIST	<p>Thousands of people in Portugal, Spain, France and Morocco have been evacuated from their homes as firefighters tackle wildfires caused by this week's heatwave, which has brought extreme temperatures of more than 45C (113F) to parts of Europe and north Africa.</p> <p>One person has died and at least 135 people have suffered mainly minor injuries since wildfires began in Portugal last week. A "state of contingency" has been in effect since Sunday, and about 800 people have been evacuated from their homes, according to the country's Civil Protection Authority.</p> <p>By Thursday, Portugal had registered 28 active fires, with more than 2,000 firefighters on the ground. Portugal's Institute for Sea and Atmosphere (IPMA) said 13 regions had reached unprecedented temperatures on Wednesday, with a temperature of 46.3C recorded in the central town of Lousã.</p> <p>"This is not a very normal situation, and it is serious in all aspects," the IPMA meteorologist Patrícia Gomes told the Portuguese press.</p> <p>Pedro Pimpão, the mayor of Pombal, a municipality in central Portugal, said the situation was "incredibly grave", adding: "We've had houses burning down, people being injured - both firefighters and civilians - and one of our residents has ended up with 50% burns."</p>

He said many villages in the area were completely isolated, meaning residents had to fight to save their homes until firefighters arrived.

The fire, which was of unprecedented proportions for the region, has since been controlled but the area is still on maximum alert.

The continuing wildfires come five years after the [devastating blaze in the central municipality of Pedrógão Grande](#), which killed 66 people and left hundreds injured, and ravaged 30,000 hectares of forest.

During a visit to injured firefighters in Lisbon on Thursday, Portugal's president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, insisted that there had been significant improvements in fire prevention in recent years.

Hundreds more people were evacuated from their homes in south-west **France** as wildfires raged out of control on Friday.

Since Tuesday, more than 1,000 firefighters, supported by nine water-bomber aircraft, have been battling two blazes fanned by scorching heat, tinder-box conditions and strong winds.

Authorities in the Gironde department, where the fires are still raging, described the situation as "adverse". One of the two Gironde fires was around the town of Landiras, south of Bordeaux, where 4,200 hectares have been burned, roads have been closed, and almost 1,000 residents have been evacuated.

The other blaze, that has already burnt 3,100 hectares, was along the Atlantic Coast close to the "Dune du Pilat" – the tallest sand dune in [Europe](#) – in the Arcachon Bay area, above which heavy clouds of dark smoke were seen rising into the sky.

About 6,000 people were evacuated from surrounding campsites on Wednesday, and another 4,000 people early on Thursday.

Temperature records have been equalled or broken across many parts of **Spain**, with the mercury hitting 44.1C in the north-western city of Ourense for the first time on Thursday. Temperatures in parts of Extremadura, where firefighters are battling a wildfire that has consumed more than 4,000 hectares of land, reached 45C on Thursday.

By Friday, another fire had broken out in Extremadura's [Monfragüe national park](#), which is famous for its biodiversity and birdlife.

Cayetano Torres, a spokesperson for the Spanish meteorological office, Aemet, said that while the heatwave – Spain's second of the summer so far – was expected to end on Monday, it may not be the last of the year.

He pointed out there had been two heatwaves in 2021, three in 2020 and 2019, one in 2018, five in 2017 and four in 2016.

"We can't draw a convincing conclusion, but a climatological analysis of temperature trends show that high summer temperatures are starting earlier and are becoming more intense," said Torres. "There's also a slight tendency towards longer-lasting heatwaves."

He also said that rising temperatures caused by global warming were already causing changes in the weather and altering the geography of parts of Spain.

"We know that something's changing: the temperature charts show that each year is hotter than the previous one," he said. "That's a clear trend and it's [producing desertification](#). You can say that Almería is an extension of the Sahara desert, and that's advancing along the south-east."

	<p>Moroccan firefighters, soldiers, police officers and civil defence workers have been battling at least four fires that are ripping through forests in the north of the country.</p> <p>At least 1,000 hectares of forest have been burned since Wednesday night in Larache and Ouezzane, according to initial reports.</p> <p>The country, which is struggling under intense droughts, has in recent days been hit by soaring temperatures approaching 45C.</p> <p>Extreme heat has also engulfed much of China this week, affecting more than 900 million people. The impacts of the high temperatures have made national headlines, with authorities warning senior citizens of the danger of such conditions.</p> <p>On Thursday, Shanghai, the country's most populous city, issued its highest alert for the third time this summer, as high temperatures repeatedly broke records. On Thursday afternoon, temperatures soared to 40.6C but fell short of Wednesday's 40.9C, which matched a previous record in 2017. However, a rainstorm on Friday brought relief for Shanghai residents.</p> <p>By Thursday, the city had already issued three red alerts in a short span of five days. Meteorologists said these warnings were a relatively rare occurrence, with just 17 issued since record-keeping began in 1873.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 Uber files leak prompts frenzy of reaction
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/jul/15/the-uber-files-how-the-leak-prompted-outrage-across-the-world
GIST	<p>The release of the Uber files has prompted a frenzy of reaction around the world, piling pressure on senior politicians, fuelling calls for a crackdown on corporate lobbying and drawing outrage from groups including traditional taxi drivers.</p> <p>The fuse was lit with the publication of revelations from a trove of more than 124,000 documents about Uber spanning from 2013 to 2017, leaked to the Guardian and shared with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and international media.</p> <p>The files, leaked by whistleblower Mark MacGann, laid bare how Uber flouted laws, duped police, exploited violence against drivers, and secretly lobbied governments during its aggressive global expansion.</p> <p>Uber has said that it “has not and will not make excuses for past behaviour that is clearly not in line with our present values”, distancing the modern-day company from its past deeds.</p> <p>But the political, regulatory and public response to the Uber files is still unfolding and Uber – not to mention the people who helped its growth – are coming under intense scrutiny in some of the world's largest economies and Uber's most important markets.</p> <p>France</p> <p>Details of how President Emmanuel Macron leapt to the aid of Uber, as it lobbied for a way into France's taxi sector, have led to calls from across the political spectrum for a parliamentary inquiry.</p> <p>Opposition politicians and the leftwing CGT trade union seized on reports of secret undeclared meetings and the promise of a “deal” brokered by Macron inside the government to help Uber.</p> <p>One parliamentarian described the revelations as a “state scandal”, amid calls from the hard left and the far right for Macron, who is already under intense pressure, to face an official inquiry from a parliamentary committee.</p> <p>Macron has been defiant, saying he would “do it again tomorrow and the day after tomorrow”.</p>

The newly appointed French minister of digital affairs, Jean-Noël Barrot, is expected to recuse himself from Uber-related matters, multiple sources reported, because his sister Hélène Barrot is Uber's European communications director.

Belgium

[“Investigations by private detectives into Brussels ministers](#), repeated violations of the sector's regulations, destruction of data, obstruction of justice, possible tax fraud, screen companies to circumvent Brussels legislation [...] are all an attack on our rule of law and our democracy.”

Those were the words of Ridouane Chahid, leader of Belgium's Socialist party PS, which has proposed a parliamentary inquiry.

Italy

Cab drivers were already protesting about plans for Uber-friendly deregulation before the leak emerged. In recent demonstrations in Naples, Milan and Rome, drivers carried banners that read “Fuck you Uber” and set off fireworks.

The Netherlands

Dutch deputy minister of finance, Marnix van Rij, has said he wants to investigate whether the Dutch tax authorities violated international agreements when dealing with Uber.

A spokesperson for the European Commission has said the EC will write to Neelie Kroes, its former vice-president, after two dozen European politicians [called for an inquiry](#) into suggestions she [secretly helped Uber lobby the Netherlands prime minister](#), Mark Rutte, and a string of other national Dutch politicians.

Ireland

Taoiseach Micheál Martin has said there should be greater transparency around corporate lobbying, after the Uber files revealed that the company tried, unsuccessfully, to convince the Fine Gael-led coalition in 2015 and 2016 to loosen taxi regulations.

Spain

Barcelona's leftwing mayor, Ada Colau, welcomed the revelations contained in the Uber files, saying they had served to “unmask” the company.

[She told El País](#) that the company had tried to “disguise themselves as innovators and small freelancers” when they had actually been “crooks”. Yolanda Díaz, Spain's second deputy prime minister and labour minister, said the leak was a [matter of “utmost seriousness”](#).

Finland

In [Finland](#), the Uber files have created a political scandal after it emerged that former Finnish prime minister Alexander Stubb met Uber executives several times while serving as PM and finance minister. The company was lobbying to change Finland's longstanding taxi regulations. In the end, Stubb resigned as prime minister in 2015 after losing his position as chairman of the Coalition party. There is no suggestion that Uber's lobbying was successful.

Europe-wide

German MEP Daniel Freund wrote to the European parliament president, Roberta Metsola, asking him to investigate Uber's lobbying practices of in Brussels.

European parliament politicians had already been working on a proposal that would reclassify millions of gig economy workers as employees, rather than independent contractors, conferring rights such as minimum pay. Amid debate about how the final proposals should look, the Uber files have given renewed impetus to leftwing factions pushing for stronger labour laws, [according to a report in Politico](#).

India

	<p>In India, one of the locations where Uber used a “kill switch” to cut access to company data during raids by the authorities, the law could change in response to revelations about Uber. The Indian Express reported that the government is considering new rules.</p> <p>“It has been fairly obvious to most people that big tech platforms have been using technology to game the system and consumers both, and have evaded scrutiny by constantly covering themselves with innovations,” said Rajeev Chandrasekhar, the minister for electronics and IT.</p> <p>Trade unions have also demanded action. The Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers (IFAT) filed a “public interest litigation” in the supreme court, calling for new laws to protect gig economy workers.</p> <p>UK</p> <p>The majority of questionable behaviour revealed by the Uber files took place outside the UK but Transport for London has said it is investigating claims that MacGann notified it of concerns about Uber in 2020 but was ignored.</p> <p>US</p> <p>Most of the revelations in the Uber files relate to Europe but they have caught the attention of American organisations lobbying for the rights of gig workers. Referring to concerns about driver safety, Gig Workers Rising wrote: “The story these documents reveal is horrific: Uber appears to have encouraged drivers to put themselves in dangerous situations when it benefited their bottom line.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/16 Day 143 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/16/russia-ukraine-war-update-what-we-know-on-day-143-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least three people were killed and 15 injured following a missile attack on Friday on Dnipro in central Ukraine, the country’s fourth-largest city with more than 1 million inhabitants. “The rockets hit an industrial plant and a busy street next to it,” the regional governor, Valentyn Reznichenko, said on his Facebook page. • The UK said the Kremlin was “fully responsible” for the death of a British captive in east Ukraine as rescue workers in Vinnytsia scoured debris for missing people after devastating Russian rocket attacks. The British foreign secretary, Liz Truss, said: “I am shocked to hear reports of the death of British aid worker Paul Urey while in the custody of a Russian proxy in Ukraine. Russia must bear the full responsibility for this.” Rescue workers were still clearing debris in the wake of strikes in Vinnytsia, central Ukraine, that killed at least 23 people. • A top Ukrainian official has accused Russia of deliberately escalating its deadly attacks on civilian targets. Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine’s national security council, told the Guardian that monitoring of Russian strikes suggested an increased emphasis in recent weeks on terrorising Ukraine’s civilian population. “That’s not my emotions but what our monitoring is telling us.” • A wounded soldier who returned from Russian captivity has recounted how Russian forces would threaten Ukrainian soldiers with the death penalty if they refused to cooperate. Denys Piskun, an Azov soldier, told Azov Media: “They said that if you don’t testify, if you don’t cooperate, there will be the death penalty. You all have the death penalty on trial as a Nazi terrorist organisation.” • Ukrainian officials have confirmed that the US House of Representatives approved \$100m in funding to train Ukrainian pilots to operate American aircraft as part of the National Defence Authorisation Act. The pilots will be trained on F-15 and F-16 jets, according to Andriy Yermak, Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s chief of staff. • Ukraine’s military losses peaked in May, the defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said in a new interview aired on Friday. Speaking to the BBC, Reznikov said: “The biggest peak of our losses was in May,” with up to 100 soldiers being killed a day.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Europe has “shot itself in the lungs” with sanctions aimed at Russia over its war in Ukraine, the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, said on Friday. Orbán, a nationalist who has ruled Hungary since 2010 and frequently clashes with Brussels, has been a fierce critic of European Union sanctions on Russian oil. In an address on national radio, Orbán urged EU leaders to change the sanctions policy. • Ukrainian rocket strikes have destroyed more than 30 Russian military logistics centres in recent weeks and significantly reduced Russia’s attacking potential, Ukraine’s defence ministry spokesperson said on Friday. The official, Oleksandr Motuzianyk, emphasised the role played by US Himars (high mobility artillery rocket systems) rocket systems, one of several types of long-range weapon supplied by the west to assist Ukraine in the war. • M270 long-range multiple rocket launch systems have arrived in Ukraine, the Ukrainian defence minister announced on Friday. “They will be good company for Himars on the battlefield.”
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HEADLINE	07/15 Concerns: BA.5 variant behind rise in cases
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/15/covid-ba5-us-wave-what-you-need-to-know
GIST	<p>How worried should I be about BA.5?</p> <p>Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations are rising in the US as BA.5 – the newest subvariant of Omicron – becomes dominant in the country, raising concerns that the immune-evasive variant will lead to another wave of illness and death.</p> <p>The Biden administration announced a plan to address the BA.5 wave that largely relies on the same tools of vaccines, treatments and tests.</p> <p>Yet the newest challenge hits a nation whose leadership has largely moved on from Covid. Few policies on precautions are in place, federal funding is running out for vaccines, treatments, tests and other mitigations, and there is little public discussion of the prevalence of Covid and the continuing importance of curtailing its spread.</p> <p>Against this backdrop, questions about BA.5 and other new variants abound: are they more transmissible or severe? Do the same precautions work against a rapidly evolving virus? Our experts tackled these questions and more.</p> <p>Are cases rising everywhere in the US?</p> <p>Pretty much, yes. Over the past two weeks, cases have increased in 38 US states, and hospitalizations have increased in 43 states. Some of the greatest case increases are among states with the lowest vaccination rates, including Louisiana, Wyoming and Arkansas – despite widespread infection in previous waves, pointing to the greater protection offered by vaccines.</p> <p>According to official case numbers, the US has been in a plateau for several weeks, but the total case count – in addition to being vastly under-reported – cloaked the concurrent fall of BA.2 subvariants and the rapid rise of BA.5.</p> <p>The ascension of the new, more immune-evasive variant shows no signs of slowing. The US is now seeing the likely beginning of a surge, with more than 120,000 new cases confirmed each day and hospitalizations rising by 12% last week from the week before.</p> <p>“The best data we have right now – which is surely not ideal, it’s lagging – is hospitalizations,” said Michael Osterholm, an epidemiologist and director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota. A rise in hospitalizations can indicate factors like increasing cases or worsening severity.</p> <p>“It’s going to take us probably another couple of weeks really to understand what’s [happening] with BA.5, but it could be substantial,” Osterholm said.</p>

“It seems like it’s going to move through the country. The scary possibility is that it moves through a really sustained way,” said Vanessa Lamers, who leads the vaccination program at the non-profit Public Health Foundation.

“That is going to depend on how much preexisting immunity we actually have, what kind of behaviors and mitigation strategies there are in place both in governments and communities, and how much we’ve prepared for another wave.”

But she is particularly concerned about BA.5’s rapid rise. It has “already surpassed the peak of the BA.2 variants and doesn’t really seem to be plateauing,” she said. “I don’t think anyone likes seeing that curve continue to go up and up.”

If I’m vaccinated, boosted, or have recovered from Covid already, am I safe?

That depends on how you define “safe”.

If you have gotten a shot or recovered from a case recently, you may not be protected against infection, but you are less likely to develop severe illness.

BA.5 seems to be very adept at evading prior immunity – even among those who had BA.1. Even if reinfections are [less severe](#) for most people, the more cases there are in a population, the higher the chances more people will be hospitalized or die from breakthrough infections.

“Clearly we’re seeing many breakthrough cases, including some that are severely ill,” Osterholm said. It is also possible to develop long Covid even after a mild or asymptomatic case.

Every new infection offers the virus an opportunity to evolve and that means newer variants can become better at evading protection against infection.

“It is challenging the very basis upon which we have tried to build, in terms of immune protection,” Osterholm said.

Much of the American public already has some level of protection, from vaccination, recovery, or both. But immunity from coronaviruses tends to wane more than immunity to other viruses, Lamers said.

She thinks of immunity like water in a cup. “Every little bit that you can fill up that water glass to the top – that is going to give you more protection.”

Those who recovered from a previous case but haven’t been vaccinated have a little water in their cup, and those who have been vaccinated and boosted have much more. But the water also evaporates over time and needs to be refilled regularly.

“For people who are fully vaccinated, they got a booster, they got another booster – maybe in between one of those vaccines, they got an infection – they probably have a really full cup,” Lamers said. “The problem is that after about six to eight months, if your immune system has not been primed, the cup has not had a little bit put in there – then your immunity against it is going down.”

How common is it to be reinfected?

It’s hard to tell how many of these cases are being driven by new infections or reinfections, particularly because the US doesn’t track cases as much as it used to.

“There are no systematically collected data that really address this,” Osterholm said. “So this is an area where we do need to count all the cases so we have that kind of information.”

But from the genomic surveillance that does exist, some of the new cases are “clearly” emerging among people who had BA.1, he said.

Boosters can reduce the chances of getting infected and they are very good at preventing severe illness and death.

Is BA.5 more transmissible than previous variants?

“At this point, I don’t think we can tell,” Osterholm said.

It’s hard to untangle transmissibility from other factors – like how good the variant is at overcoming immunity.

Changing behavior probably accounts for some of BA.5’s spread. The relative lack of precautions in the US and the difficulty understanding how many cases there are and how prevalent the virus is, means that more people may be at risk of getting sick than in previous waves.

Is it as severe as other variants?

In animal studies, BA.5 appears to be more severe. But in real life, where much of the population has some immune protection, it may not be clinically significant – especially given the continued protection the vaccines offer against severe illness.

“All the data we’re seeing right now supports that particularly four doses of vaccine does provide substantial protection from serious illness, hospitalizations and deaths,” Osterholm said.

“Statistically, you’re going to have a lower risk of having severe illness” if you’re vaccinated, he said. “That’s a really key message.”

But communities with low vaccination rates may be harder hit.

How have other countries fared?

In Portugal, cases, hospitalizations, and deaths rose significantly. But in South Africa, [cases rose somewhat](#) while hospitalizations and deaths stayed relatively low.

“The question is, what is it going to do here?” Osterholm asked. “It’s still unknown right now.”

There are differences between these populations – Portugal is highly vaccinated, while South Africa is younger and may have had additional protection from their outbreak of the Beta variant, which did less damage in the US.

Another new variant, BA.2.75, that is rising in some countries may also complicate predictions of what happens next.

“We can’t really tell what they mean until we actually see what they do in the population,” Osterholm said.

What is the best precaution against BA.4/5?

“The same kinds of protections that worked for Omicron BA.1 are going to work for BA.5,” Lamers said.

That includes being up to date on vaccines, especially boosters; wearing a high-quality, well-fitting mask, especially in indoor settings; widespread testing and treatment options and ventilation and air filtration. Measures like these “can do a lot for your risk of transmission”, Osterholm said.

“It still has to be a multilayer strategy,” Lamers said. “It’s not magic; it’s still a virus.”

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SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/starbucks-dealing-with-pushback-amid-planned-closure-several-local-stores/JONYLCHZYFBUTAW6GLGY4IAQB4/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — As Starbucks plans to close five of its Seattle stores, there's pushback from some workers who argue that the closures are a union-busting tactic. The company claims the closures are due to safety concerns.</p> <p>On Friday, some workers protested in a parking lot along Olive Way over the closures and said three of the nonunion shops that are part of the closures are just collateral.</p> <p>"We firmly believe that a lot of the stores that they are closing are a convenient scapegoat for them to say: 'This isn't union busting, look these stores aren't unionized,'" said barista Brent Hayes.</p> <p>Starbucks corporate officials said any claims of retaliation are unequivocally false.</p> <p>Five Seattle shops are closing based on how many crime-related complaints were logged at each store.</p> <p>Starbucks looked at rates of drug use, theft and assault.</p> <p>The company said its decision had nothing to do with two of the locations being union shops.</p> <p>The unionized stores are located on Olive Way in Capitol Hill and 5th Avenue in the Chinatown-International District.</p> <p>"They had management come in and ask them if they felt unsafe, nobody claimed to feel unsafe, and they were still told that their store is closing due to crime rates," said Hayes.</p> <p>Among those who raised their voice and held a sign outside the Olive Way store was Mari Cosgrove, who has worked at the Chinatown-International District location for the past four years.</p> <p>"Starbucks is saying it's about safety, but we won our union election May 27, and I feel like that has a lot more to do with it," said Cosgrove.</p> <p>Cosgrove said she feels safe at the Chinatown-International District location and her connection to that specific store runs deep.</p> <p>"Back in high school, I would study there, all the time," said Cosgrove. "And so this is a community that I've been a part of for a long time. I could work at any other Starbucks, but it wouldn't be the same."</p> <p>Cosgrove told KIRO 7 she doesn't know where her team would be transferred to.</p> <p>"The baristas at these locations are being forced to transfer potentially to nonunionized stores," Hayes yelled into a bullhorn.</p> <p>According to Starbucks officials, any union partners like her will have to bargain before they can be moved elsewhere in the company.</p> <p>"I've been talking to our regulars in the morning and some of them have been tears in their eyes, saying goodbye to me," said Cosgrove.</p> <p>A labor complaint filed by Starbucks Workers United claims the closures are an act of retaliation.</p> <p>The union said a solution can be found if the company agrees to bargain.</p> <p>Workers told KIRO 7 that they expect the five stores to close at the end of the month.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 Everett nurses: staffing shortage crisis
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/nurses-warn-of-worrisome-staff-shortages
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. - Nurses in the North Sound are sounding the alarm with elected leaders, warning too many in their field are getting burned out and open positions are not being filled quickly enough to make up for it.</p> <p>Everett City Council got an earful this week from the nursing staff at Providence who told them the shortage is starting to impact patient care.</p> <p>"It's frustrating. I go home frustrated and I want to do a better job," said registered nurse Julie Bynum.</p> <p>Bynum has spent nearly 30 years caring for surgical patients. She works at Providence in Everett and she says a staffing shortage is becoming a crisis.</p> <p>"Clearly, you don't want to be in the hospital with COVID," she said. "Especially when we don't have the staff."</p> <p>The shortage forced a temporary pause in new admissions for Providence's inpatient pediatric unit, which is getting help from Seattle Children's for now.</p> <p>"I'm deeply concerned about what's happening here," said one nurse during a Zoom call with the Everett City Council.</p> <p>In all, 10 nurses shared their worries with the council.</p> <p>"I've never seen anything like this before," said another.</p> <p>They hope the council could pass an ordinance mandating hazard pay in an attempt to keep overly stressed workers on the job.</p> <p>"It is becoming a crisis and the lack of action taken by our hospital is putting our community at risk and we are asking for your help," another nurse told elected leaders.</p> <p>Providence says the nurse shortage is a problem statewide, leaving 6,100 nursing positions unfilled across Washington. The hospital says temporary nurses can fill in the gaps, but now the hospital is competing for temporary and permanent workers on a national level.</p> <p>Everett Mayor Cassie Franklin thanked nurses for speaking out. The city attorney said it is unlikely elected leaders can enforce hazard pay, and Franklin says hospital officials acknowledged staffing struggles.</p> <p>"(They are) acutely aware of the challenges they are facing, they are concerned and they are doing everything in their power, just as we are, to fill the vacancies they have," she said.</p> <p>Providence says late last year, it invested \$220 million nationwide in an attempt to retain and lure caregivers to open positions.</p> <p>Next week, the Washington State Hospital Association will brief conditions state-wide, according to a Providence spokesperson.</p> <p>Nurses in Everett say the burnout is accelerating departures and Bynum hopes the public hears their warning to stay healthy and remain patient if you end up needing hospital care.</p> <p>"It's very frustrating when you feel like you haven't done a very good job and you feel you've failed your patient at the end of the day," she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 Seattle parking tickets transition confusion
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/confusion-miscommunication-led-to-seattle-canceling-200000-parking-tickets/
GIST	<p>As Seattle’s parking enforcement officers were preparing to move from the Seattle Police Department to the Seattle Department of Transportation last fall, Officer Nathan Morrow remembered feeling concerned that he would soon be writing illegal tickets.</p> <p>Before the transition, Morrow said in a recent hearing before the state Public Employment Relations Commission, enforcement officers had the authority to do their jobs as SPD employees, as laid out by the city charter, through permission from the chief. “And we were no longer going to be part of the Police Department,” he said.</p> <p>As it turned out, Morrow’s concerns were justified. In May, Seattle canceled more than 200,000 parking tickets, concluding that, for seven months, parking enforcement officers didn’t have the authority to write them. The city has promised refunds of over \$5 million in paid tickets and nullified another \$5 million worth of unpaid tickets.</p> <p>The expensive mess, which comes as Seattle faces a \$117 million budget deficit, was the result of a number of breakdowns, including legal uncertainty, siloed departments and a departmental transition that dragged out for months, according to emails obtained through public records requests, transcripts and exhibits from an ongoing labor dispute, and a letter sent Thursday from the mayor’s office to the Seattle City Council.</p> <p>Central to the mishap was the issuance of so-called special commissions – certifications written by the chief of police authorizing nonpolice to perform enforcement actions. Not until April, seven months after parking enforcement left SPD, were the special commissions provided.</p> <p>In a letter to the Seattle City Council, sent Thursday and obtained by The Seattle Times, Mayor Bruce Harrell blamed a lack of coordination, “conflicting legal interpretations surrounding a recently passed state law regarding background checks for commissions, a failure of collaboration between departments and the absence of an assigned project manager with authority to direct and coordinate departments engaged in the transfer.”</p> <p>Legal confusion</p> <p>The first breakdown was related to disagreement over how to interpret new state legislation regulating police certifications. A new law, Senate Bill 5051, overhauled the process for certifying both police officers and reserve officers. In October, a month after parking enforcement had moved from SPD, legal staff questioned how the legislation would affect interim police Chief Adrian Diaz’s ability to approve new special commissions.</p> <p>“Of particular note, there was discussion of the challenges recently adopted state legislation will impose on the ability of the Seattle Police Chief to authorize Special Police Commissions going forward,” staff wrote in a readout of an October conversation between legal and policy officials overseeing the transition. “Representatives from SPD, SDOT and Law will dive deeper into the details of this one over the coming weeks.”</p> <p>That dive continued for months, according to weekly updates sent to staff. “Staying in touch with the Law Dept regarding special police commissions,” read the updates week after week into late December — four months into the transition.</p> <p>In late December, the Law Department finally concluded that parking enforcement officers should have special commissions issued by SPD.</p> <p>But even after the legal advice from the city attorney’s office, Harrell wrote Thursday, SPD’s legal counsel continued to interpret the legal ramifications differently. He said SPD should have moved forward, despite their concerns, and that liability risks did not justify any delay.</p>

A spokesperson for SPD said the department could not comment and deferred to the mayor's office.

Councilmember Lisa Herbold, who was involved in the transition early, said she shared Harrell's concerns, particularly regarding SPD's interpretation of state law.

There are "challenges of changing the status quo," she said in a statement.

"Yet, we have a collective responsibility to ensure that we not allow agenda-driven legal analysis to resist reform, especially when public tax dollars are at stake."

Lack of coordination

At the same time, SDOT lacked any central coordination for the transition, Harrell's office concluded. SDOT had a project manager and a subcommittee dedicated to the effort, but they did not have authoritative oversight to resolve disagreements and coordinate efforts, Harrell said. Meanwhile, an absence of involvement from the mayor's office "led departments to act independently and in silos."

"It was clear at the time that moving employees to a new department for the first time in 50 years was a challenging effort requiring significant coordination; however, the processes and management techniques needed to make the transfer successful were not prioritized or adopted," Harrell wrote.

Driving the transition within the city was a belief that the "status quo" would prevail as the details of the transition were ironed out. Then-SDOT director Sam Zimbabwe told union officials in an August email that they intended to maintain status quo "to the greatest extent possible." Union representatives testified that an even stronger commitment was made to them in an Aug. 27 meeting.

"The one thing that SDOT continued to tell us when we would bring up these concerns was that they — everything was going to remain the same," Morrow testified in an ongoing labor dispute between the Seattle Parking Enforcement Officers Guild and the city of Seattle. SDOT, he said, assured them that they had commitments from SPD through at least the end of 2021, and that they would put that in writing. Morrow testified he hadn't seen that document.

On Jan. 15, all special commissions expire and need to be reissued. Shortly after taking office, Harrell was under the impression parking enforcement officers already had them and they just needed renewing, said spokesperson Jamie Housen.

But in late March, Harrell learned that parking enforcement had still not been commissioned, prompting the canceled tickets, said Housen.

In his letter Thursday, Harrell said none of the documents provided to him upon taking office made mention of the disagreement over special commissions. Transition papers provided to The Seattle Times through a public records request show that, while Harrell was given a written briefing about parking enforcement's transition, it made no mention of special commissions.

New face on enforcement

Discussions about moving parking enforcement out of SPD began at Seattle City Hall in summer 2020, as protests spurred by George Floyd's murder sprung up throughout the city. The move was intended to put a new face on an enforcement action that was not carried out by armed officers. It would represent the most significant reduction to SPD's budget amid calls to "defund the police."

City staff knew as early as fall 2020 that parking enforcement would need special authorization to do its work if it transferred to SDOT, according to emails. When legislation was released in 2021, it stated explicitly that their duties would be dictated by "the extent allowed by the commission of Parking Enforcement Officers as Special Police Officers."

“There should be no debate that the Council was clear — in both ordinances passed regarding this personnel transfer — that PEOs needed to be issued special police commissions upon relocation to SDOT,” Harrell said.

Bumpy transition

The union representing parking enforcement officers opposed moving to SDOT from the start. Now, they’re locked in a labor battle with the city, arguing that changes were made to their work environment — including losing access to the FBI’s Criminal Justice Information Services database and quick backup from SPD — without being bargained.

Meanwhile, the public is unlikely to notice a difference in parking enforcement: The patches on the officers’ uniforms still read “Seattle police.”

The city so far contends the mishap affects only parking tickets. Housen said 85% of eligible tickets have been refunded.

But Chuck Labertew, president of Lincoln Towing, isn’t so sure. He towed 10,256 cars in those seven months and auctioned off around 1,700. Many of those did not begin with a citation from parking enforcement.

The city pays him for his services, so he’s unconcerned about his bottom line. But he wonders about what he calls “John Lennon’s guitar” — the idea that someone could claim they’d left John Lennon’s guitar in their car when it was auctioned off after receiving a now-voided citation and claim huge losses from the city.

“Honestly, I think that there will be a class action on this,” he said.

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HEADLINE	07/15 Seattle remote workers ready to quit?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/some-city-of-seattle-workers-ready-to-quit-rather-than-return-to-the-office/
GIST	<p>Hundreds of city of Seattle employees working remotely may be ready to quit over proposed return-to-office rules that some think are less about productivity than about repopulating downtown’s flagging business district.</p> <p>But city officials say the new policy is necessary to help move the city toward a post-pandemic normal and it gives employees far more flexibility than before COVID-19.</p> <p>The dispute has been simmering since June 13, when Mayor Bruce Harrell emailed employees that he was preparing a “long-term remote/hybrid work policy” for later this year “with an expectation that staff will report to the office or worksite at least two workdays a week.” That’s roughly on par with what many private employers have announced.</p> <p>Harrell’s email arrived two months after a majority of the city employees who could work remotely in some form — about 35% of the roughly 13,000-member city workforce — were told in March to return to the office.</p> <p>A new city policy for remote and hybrid work was always going to be needed to replace the “hastily developed policies adopted at the heights of a global pandemic,” Harrell spokesperson Jamie Housen said in an email Thursday.</p> <p>Since March, all but around 2,300 workers, or roughly 18% of the total, have come back to at least twice a week, Housen said, adding that “employee access to remote and hybrid options has significantly increased compared to pre-pandemic policies.”</p>

But those explanations aren't working for many of the affected employees, including the roughly 1,300 who are fully remote and the 1,000 who come in once a week, according to the union representing most of them.

They say Harrell's proposal poses the risk of COVID spread to remote employees and their families, and subjects employees to potential security risks downtown, said Shomari Anderson, a union steward with PROTEC17, which has been negotiating with the city over the return-to-office proposal since June 28. (Under the union's collective bargaining agreement with the city, policies that change working conditions are subject to negotiation, said Anderson.)

Although the number of new COVID cases in Washington state has leveled off recently and deaths are falling, hospitalizations have ticked up, according to state data.

Many union members are also unhappy about the prospect of resuming their pre-pandemic commutes — all the more for employees who relocated to communities where housing is more affordable, Anderson said.

And many of those affected workers say they'd rather quit than come back, according to a recent survey by the union, which found that 23% of respondents are "considering separating from city employment due to return-to-office plans" and another 31% said they "wouldn't rule out the possibility."

Those sentiments represent "a very, very strong signal, that, if I was on the other side, I would actually listen to," said Anderson.

The tensions mirror those emerging across the job market, as many employees resist the ending of a remote work model some feel was just as productive as its in-person predecessor.

That sentiment is pronounced among some union members, who say the city hasn't yet demonstrated why, after more than two years, a fully or mostly remote work model no longer works, union officials say. "We've been out of office for almost two-and-a-half years now," Anderson said. "And the metrics all point towards us having ... excelled at our job."

In last month's email, Harrell argued that in-person work is "key to enhancing the collaboration, communication, and relationship-building that will allow us to build One Seattle," as the mayor calls his broader efforts to solve city challenges and move the city away from COVID-related emergency measures. Housen, the mayor's spokesperson, said the mayor "is primarily focused on ensuring the city provides the highest quality of services and support to its residents."

Harrell also noted that being able to work remotely all or most of the time is a "privilege" available to only roughly a third of the city's workforce.

But union officials say those explanations don't support further limitations on remote work. They also say the mayor's proposal may conflict with previously negotiated contract language over so-called Alternative Work Arrangements, which include remote and hybrid work.

Under that language, "unless the city could demonstrate that there was a 'business need' for employees to come in," the city was required to work with employees to "accommodate their Alternative Work Arrangement," said Karen Estevenin, executive director of PROTEC17.

Instead, many union members feel Harrell's proposal partly reflects pressure on City Hall by Seattle business leaders.

Many members still believe city workers are "being brought back so they can walk down the street during their lunch hour and buy a sandwich," said Karen Estevenin, executive director of PROTEC17. And members "don't feel good about that," she added.

Since February, the number of workers in downtown offices has averaged 34% of pre-pandemic levels and was at 32% last week, according to cellphone location data from Placer.ai posted by the Downtown Seattle Association.

Housen said that “while bringing employees back to the office has helped activate and revitalize downtown and neighborhoods across the city, Mayor Harrell is primarily focused on ensuring the city provides the highest quality of services and support to its residents.”

Housen did not respond when asked whether the mayor’s office has data or analysis showing remote work is negatively affecting those services or support.

Downtown business leaders welcomed the mayor’s proposal, but rejected the suggestion that they’ve pressured the city to bring back office workers any sooner than it otherwise would have.

The city is “one of the biggest employers downtown, so there’s a real significant impact,” said Jon Scholes, president and CEO of the Downtown Seattle Association.

Although the DSA had conversations in February with both the incoming Harrell administration and with King County government officials about the importance of bringing office workers back downtown, both Harrell and King County Executive Dow Constantine were already keenly aware of the positive impact government office workers would have downtown, Scholes said.

“We don’t need to beat that into them,” he added. “They come to the table really recognizing that and wanting to help where they can.”

King County has been slowly bringing its roughly 5,000 remote workers back to their offices since March 1, but does not appear to have a new, more stringent policy.

Harrell’s proposal comes after earlier attempts to rein in pandemic-related work arrangements were delayed by COVID.

In December, as omicron cases surged, outgoing Mayor Jenny Dukan and Mayor-elect Harrell agreed that employees “currently teleworking may continue until department return-to-office plans are implemented in the Spring of 2022, unless there is an ongoing business need for them to return to the worksite,” according to a Dec. 20, 2021, notice from the mayor’s office.

In March, Harrell announced that city employees would begin the return to in-person work on March 16.

Estevenin said it wasn’t clear why the Harrell administration chose June to announce the new policy, though she thinks the mayor wants the issue resolved before starting negotiations this fall over a new union contract.

Union officials want to push Harrell to dump his two-day minimum “one-size-fits-all” requirement for remote workers in favor of continuing to set remote work arrangements on a case-by-case basis, Estevenin said. Existing policy has been “working exceptionally” by allowing employees and managers to jointly figure out how to “move the work forward with mutual partnership,” Estevenin said.

The mayor’s office declined to discuss bargaining objectives. But according to Anderson, city officials say the two-day minimum isn’t negotiable and want to focus instead on ways to lessen the impacts on remote employees who are now required to be in-office part of the week.

Timothy Emery, managing partner at Emery Reddy, a Seattle-based employment law firm, said it’s not clear whether union members can override the city’s legal right to set conditions of work, “unless there’s a very specific provision in the [union’s] collective bargaining agreement that prevents that from occurring.”

	<p>But Emery said union members may still have more leverage, given Seattle’s tight labor market. “It’s pretty obvious that if you don’t make this group of people happy, they’re just going to go work somewhere else,” Emery said.</p> <p>Pushing a mandatory office return may not be “a great strategy if the city wants to retain long-term employees.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 OFM: 2/3rd counties more deaths than births
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/two-thirds-of-wa-counties-had-more-deaths-than-births-this-past-year/
GIST	<p>It’s often seen as a marker of an area’s demographic health: more births than deaths. But recently, a record number of Washington counties have been seeing the opposite.</p> <p>According to population data released earlier this month by the Washington Office of Financial Management, more than two-thirds of Washington’s counties — 27 out of 39 — recorded more deaths than births, also called a “natural decrease,” from April 1, 2021, to April 1, 2022. That’s the highest number of counties with more deaths than births since the state began collecting data in 1960.</p> <p>Overall, though, the state had a natural increase, meaning there were more births than deaths. Around 84,600 people were born in Washington, and 70,500 state residents died — that pencils out to a net increase of just over 14,000. That was largely due to growth in the Seattle area. King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties all had natural increases; combined, the three counties had about 14,300 more births than deaths.</p> <p>Census data shows that the majority of U.S. counties experienced more deaths than births in 2021, and this trend started even before the pandemic. In Washington, too, the number of counties with a natural decrease has been on a slow rise over the past couple decades.</p> <p>Back in the 1990s and earlier, fewer than 10 Washington counties would experience a natural decrease in any given year, OFM data shows. The last time all 39 of the state’s counties experienced a natural increase was 1983-1984.</p> <p>But in recent years, the birthrate has dropped in the U.S., and census data shows that women are having fewer children and having their first child later in life.</p> <p>An aging population also results in a greater number of deaths and fewer births. Census data shows seven Washington counties have a median age higher than 50, and all seven had a natural decrease. The county with the state’s highest median age is Jefferson, where Port Townsend is located, with a median age of 59. Some counties saw higher median ages as younger people moved to cities in other counties, likely in part because of economic troubles in some rural areas.</p> <p>In the April 1, 2019, to April 1, 2020 period, 16 Washington counties had a natural decrease, which was a record number at that time. Then, as COVID-19 spread across the state, the number of deaths increased. Now, 11 more counties have shown a natural decrease.</p> <p>It’s worth noting that COVID and aging populations aren’t the only reasons the number of deaths increased in some parts of the state. As I’ve written in my column, we’ve also seen a surge in so-called “deaths of despair” — those related to alcohol and drug abuse, and from suicide.</p> <p>Births and deaths are just two components of population change. The third is migration, and OFM data shows growth from migration in nearly every county in the state from 2021 to 2022.</p> <p>The one exception is Adams County in Eastern Washington, which had a tiny net loss of 26 due to migration. But Adams had 226 more births than deaths, so the county’s total population still grew.</p>

In fact, only one county had a loss of total population: Clallam, where Port Angeles is located, shrank by 125 residents this year. While Clallam grew some from migration, those gains were wiped out by a natural decrease of around 700, the highest in the state.

In two Eastern Washington counties — Columbia and Garfield — the population was unchanged. Both these counties also had a natural decrease, but saw growth from migration.

Statewide, the population increased by 97,400, bringing the total to 7.86 million. Since around 14,000 of that population gain came from natural increase, the remaining 83,300 was from net migration.

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HEADLINE	07/15 Amazon pauses construction in Bellevue
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/amazon/amazon-pauses-construction-in-bellevue/
GIST	<p>Amid an ongoing shift to hybrid work, Amazon is pausing some construction on its Bellevue campus.</p> <p>As employees continue to work from home and the company continues to evaluate what its office presence will look like in the future, Amazon said this week it is changing its construction plans in order to experiment and reimagine the setup of its traditional work floors.</p> <p>“Our offices are long-term investments, and we want to make sure that we design them in a way that meets our employees’ needs in the future,” said John Schoettler, vice president of Global Real Estate and Facilities at Amazon. “As we continue to learn, we’re pausing construction to reevaluate the designs of some of our projects in Bellevue.”</p> <p>The announcement comes just a few weeks after Amazon highlighted its growth in Bellevue, writing in a June blog post that it was poised to hit a milestone of 10,000 workers this summer. The Eastside is “where the majority of our growth is in the future,” Guy Palumbo, Amazon’s director of public policy for HQ1, told The Seattle Times last month.</p> <p>Amazon said Friday its decision to pause construction does not change its stated commitment to bringing 25,000 jobs to the Eastside by 2025.</p> <p>The paused projects include parts of the largest office developments underway in the region — Vulcan’s 555 tower, West Main and Bellevue 600 — according to a recent report from commercial real estate firm Kidder Mathews. Together the three projects total nearly 3 million square feet.</p> <p>Amazon said it will still complete the “core and shell” of most of these projects, as well as the lobby, communal areas and retail spaces. Those projects include the 555 tower, Towers 2 and 3 at West Main, Tower 1 at Bellevue 600 and The Artiste.</p> <p>At the 42-story 555 tower, Amazon will complete the working floors up to the 19th level, but is pausing construction plans for the second tower at Bellevue 600.</p> <p>“The pandemic has significantly changed the way people work,” Schoettler said. “For our corporate and tech roles, we’ve adopted a hybrid model that offers employees increased flexibility — each team decides the balance between in-office and remote work that makes sense for them.”</p> <p>“It’s early days, and like many companies, we’re still learning how these new habits may impact our office footprint.”</p> <p>Despite uncertainty around the return to the office, companies have so far been holding onto office space in Bellevue.</p> <p>The office vacancy rate is 5.5%, the lowest in the region, according to Kidder Mathews.</p>

	<p>Inflation, labor shortages and other challenges are also dogging the construction industry. Kidder Mathews noted in its analysis of the office market that while more office projects are planned, “Many Seattle developers are waiting to see how market conditions play out.”</p> <p>With roughly 55,000 workers, Seattle is still Amazon’s biggest campus. The company plans to create 25,000 jobs in its second headquarters in Crystal City, Virginia, just as in its Bellevue location. Amazon’s 18 other North American tech hubs together include 65,000 employees.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 Boeing return to office plan: praise, scorn
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/boeing-aerospace/boeings-back-to-office-announcement-evokes-criticism-praise/
GIST	<p>Boeing’s latest back-to-office move — this time for its backlogged 737 operation — is getting a now-familiar pushback from affected workers, but also some grudging praise from at least one industry expert.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Jason Clark, vice president for fabrication and supply chain engineering, told 737 program engineers who are fully or partly remote to be ready to return to their Renton offices four days a week, according to employees who attended the online meeting.</p> <p>The policy will be formally announced in a subsequent email as early as next week, attendees said they were told, and could affect up to a few thousand Seattle-area employees, according to the engineer’s union, Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace.</p> <p>“As we increase production rates, hire thousands of new employees and continue our airplane development work, it’s beneficial to have teams in the office more often to support our customer commitments and collaborate in person, including sharing best practices and responding promptly to emergent needs,” according to the statement, which Boeing also provided June 25 after reports that procurement workers would also be required to be in-office.</p> <p>But several engineers who attended the Wednesday meeting said Clark gave scant justification for the end of the current remote-work policy, which they said allows teams to set individual workplace schedules based on project needs.</p> <p>They said Clark offered no data to show remote workers were less productive or were contributing to production or delivery delays. Clark “even acknowledged that he didn’t know of any data that supports that,” said a midcareer 737 engineer who attended Wednesday’s meeting and who, like others interviewed for this story, asked not to be identified for fear of losing their job.</p> <p>Instead, the new 737 in-office policy seemed focused on reviving Boeing’s office-based work culture and sending a signal to worried customers that the aerospace giant is committed to fixing production and delivery problems, several attendees said.</p> <p>Clark told engineers that customers who visited Boeing’s facilities were put off by the absence of engineers, attendees said.</p> <p>Clark told attendees some visiting airline executives “weren’t happy ... seeing empty engineering sections,” said another midcareer engineer who was at Wednesday’s meeting.</p> <p>Several attendees asked Clark whether the benefits of in-office culture and better customer image “outweighed the potential for losing people, and he straight up said ‘yes’ — just flat ‘yes,’” one attendee said.</p> <p>A Boeing spokesperson was unable to confirm whether Clark made those statements and didn’t comment on whether they would have reflected company policy.</p>

Tensions over the future of remote work at Boeing echo those at many other organizations as employers and workers contest the shape of the office job after more than two years of pandemic adaptation.

Many tech firms have slowed their back-to-office plans, in part to avoid the loss of high-skilled employees who prefer remote work to long commutes and office distractions. Even local governments like the city of Seattle are struggling to persuade employees to give up remote work.

In the case of Boeing, however, at least one industry expert thinks the company is right to pull some engineers back to the office.

Richard Aboulafia, a veteran industry analyst and managing director at AeroDynamic Advisory, said while there isn't a single workplace prescription for all companies or job types, at companies like Boeing and in roles like product development or aircraft certification, "it's absolutely essential to have that team in the workplace."

Aboulafia also agreed that for Boeing, which is struggling to regain some customers' confidence, a dispersed engineering team "isn't a great look." Although the pandemic is far from over, "things have been getting better and customers want to see in an [original equipment manufacturer] that's fully engaged," Aboulafia said.

Still, Aboulafia, who has sharply criticized Boeing management, said he sympathizes with company engineers who aren't hearing a compelling argument for an office-based team culture due to "the complete absence of leadership in terms of the company's future."

"If you really had a message from the top, that was, 'We're going to dominate this industry again [and] here's how we're going to do it.' ... It would inspire people to get together and share ideas," Aboulafia said.

Lacking that, he added, "Yeah, I'd kind of want to stay home and be closer to my coffee machine, too."

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HEADLINE	07/15 Tacoma police justified 2017 fatal shooting
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article263492428.html
GIST	<p>The Pierce County Prosecuting Attorney's Office announced Thursday that three Tacoma Police Department officers used justified and reasonable force when they shot and killed a 58-year-old man who fired gunshots at them in 2017.</p> <p>A letter from Prosecuting Attorney Mary Robnett to TPD Chief Avery Moore outlining her decision provides a more detailed look at what led to police firing at Frankie Santos when they were called to a residential street in South Tacoma for reports of a man acting erratically.</p> <p>Three officers fired at Santos, and an autopsy found that he was struck six times, according to the letter. The officers involved were identified about a week after the Sept. 10, 2017 shooting as William Johnson, Matthew Watters and Jeffrey Robillard. According to the letter, Robillard fired the fatal shots with a rifle.</p> <p>Police spokesperson Shelbie Boyd said Robillard and Watters retired from the department in 2021. Johnson, now a police patrol specialist, is still working.</p> <p>Robnett wrote in the letter that Robillard was left with "no reasonably effective alternative" than to shoot at Santos. Robillard went to the scene after shots were exchanged between the other officers and Santos. Before Robillard arrived, Watters and Johnson had taken cover behind a patrol vehicle, and Santos was behind a utility pole.</p>

Three 9 mm pistols with partially loaded ammunition clips were found near Santos' body. According to the letter, all three were purchased by the man between 2012 and 2017. Based on cartridges recovered from the scene, Santos is believed to have fired two of his pistols at least 39 times. Four bullets struck a patrol vehicle, two hit an occupied residence and one struck a resident's car.

The fatal shooting of Santos preceded the passing of a state law which prohibits law enforcement agencies from investigating their own department's uses of deadly force. That law, Initiative 940, went into effect in 2020.

In 2017, Tacoma police regularly conducted their own deadly force investigations, the letter states. This shooting was investigated by the department's Major Crimes Investigative Team, and an investigator from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office also participated and observed. The Pierce County Medical Examiner's Office conducted its own medical investigation.

REPORTS OF ARMED MAN

The incident began when police were called to the 5600 block of South Lawrence Street for reports of a man who had driven to the area, approached a house on the street and banged on a window with a stick. Witnesses reported seeing two firearms on him, one holstered and one in his back pocket.

It remains unclear why Santos drove to the street. According to the letter, detectives attempted to determine the reason, but they did not find any association between Santos and the address or the neighborhood. None of the non-police witnesses who were interviewed for the investigation knew Santos or had any prior contact with him.

Toxicology tests indicated that Santos had 0.10 mg/L of methamphetamine in his blood at the time of his death.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	07/15 LendingTree denies 1, confirms other leak
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/lendingtree-denies-connection-to-data-breach-affecting-200000-but-confirms-a-different-one/
GIST	<p>The financial services giant LendingTree has denied any connection to a reported data breach involving 200,000 loan applications found on the dark web, although the company did confirm that the information of tens of thousands of customers was exposed in a separate breach in February.</p> <p>Reports emerged in recent weeks of cybercriminals selling sensitive information purporting to be from applications originating from LendingTree, which connects customers to lenders.</p> <p>The company began sending out breach notification letters on June 29, leading many to believe that the 200,000 loan applications on on the dark web were legitimate.</p> <p>But LendingTree director of communications Megan Greuling told The Record that the notifications the company sent out were in response to a "code vulnerability" in LendingTree's platform that exposed the sensitive information of more than 70,000 customers in February.</p> <p>This information included names, Social Security numbers, addresses and dates of birth. Greuling added that the company also notified about 700 customers in January of a data breach that took place last November, which also occurred because of a "vulnerability in one of its online interfaces for personal loans," which she said "no longer exists."</p>

“We are working to implement additional security measures to protect consumers who visit our online interfaces,” Greuling said.

She noted that in both cases, LendingTree offered free credit monitoring and identity theft protection to consumers for about two years.

According to Greuling, LendingTree’s security team looked into reports of the 200,000 leaked loan applications.

“Our investigation determined that this data leak did not originate at LendingTree. In fact, we obtained the full data set and found there to be no match when compared to our consumer database,” Greuling said.

“The threat actor who was selling the data set on the dark web must have mislabeled the data source accidentally or intentionally mislabeled the data set source for malicious intent, perhaps in an attempt to increase black market value.”

The 200,000 loan applications for sale were [first discovered by researchers with RestorePrivacy](#) and were from October and November of last year. The information included addresses, phone numbers, IP addresses, loan form submissions, loan type, credit score and more.

RestorePrivacy noted that LendingTree shares user data with several affiliates, partners, service providers and more.

In 2008, the company [disclosed another data breach](#) that involved several former employees handing over access to confidential customer records to different mortgage lenders.

The lenders were given access to customer data that ranged from social security numbers to income and employment data. The companies then used that information to market the mortgages they were selling.

LendingTree admitted that the lenders had access to the information from October 2006 to some time in 2008. According to Reuters, LendingTree never disclosed when it discovered the breach, only telling the news outlet that it contacted law enforcement about the issue.

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HEADLINE	07/18 Unpatched WordPress plugin targeted
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/unpatched-wpbakery-wordpress-plugin-vulnerability-increasingly-targeted-attacks
GIST	<p>The Wordfence team at WordPress security company Defiant warns of an increase in attacks targeting an unpatched vulnerability in the Kaswara addon for the WPBakery Page Builder WordPress plugin.</p> <p>Tracked as CVE-2021-24284 (CVSS score of 10) and disclosed in April 2021, the critical-severity security bug allows an unauthenticated attacker to upload malicious PHP files to a vulnerable site, potentially achieving remote code execution.</p> <p>According to Wordfence, an attacker can exploit the flaw to inject malicious JavaScript code into any file on the WordPress installation and completely take over a vulnerable site.</p> <p>When discovered, the flaw was being actively exploited, and Wordfence warned WordPress website administrators that the plugin had been closed without a patch, urging them to remove it immediately.</p> <p>Although more than a year has passed since the zero-day was disclosed, between 4,000 and 8,000 sites continue to use the plugin, which exposes them to malicious attacks.</p>

	<p>Over the past two weeks, Wordfence has seen a massive surge in the number of attack attempts targeting the vulnerability, at an average of 440,000 per day. The attacks come from 10,215 attacking IP addresses, with five IP addresses being responsible for the majority of assaults.</p> <p>The attackers, Wordfence explains, are probing more than 1.5 million WordPress sites for the vulnerable plugin, but the vast majority of them are not impacted, given that they do not use the plugin.</p> <p>“The majority of the attacks we have seen are sending a POST request to <code>/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php</code> using the <code>uploadFontIcon</code> AJAX action found in the plugin to upload a file to the impacted website. Your logs may show the following query string on these events: <code>/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?action=uploadFontIcon</code> HTTP/1.1,” Wordfence says.</p> <p>Most of the attacks attempt to upload a .ZIP archive containing a malicious PHP file that is extracted to the <code>/wp-content/uploads/kaswara/icons/</code> directory, and which allows the attackers to deploy additional payloads.</p> <p>Wordfence has noticed the use of the NDSW trojan in some of these attacks. The trojan can inject code into legitimate JavaScript files and can be used to redirect users to malicious domains.</p> <p>“At this time the plugin has been closed, and the developer has not been responsive regarding a patch. The best option is to fully remove the Kaswara Modern WPBakery Page Builder Addons plugin from your WordPress website,” Wordfence notes.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 Industrial systems targeted w/malware
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2022/07/malware-circulating-online-wrangles-industrial-systems-into-a-botnet/
GIST	<p>From the what-could-possibly-go-wrong files comes this: People hawking password-cracking software are targeting the hardware used in industrial-control facilities with malicious code that makes their systems part of a botnet, a researcher reported.</p> <p>Lost passwords happen in many organizations. A programmable logic controller—used to automate processes inside factories, electric plants, and other industrial settings, for example, may be set up and largely forgotten over the following years. When a replacement engineer later identifies a problem affecting the PLC, they may discover the now long-gone original engineer never left the passcode behind before departing the company.</p> <p>According to a blog post from security firm Dragos, an entire ecosystem of malware attempts to capitalize on scenarios like this one inside industrial facilities. Online advertisements like those below promote password crackers for PLCs and human-machine interfaces, which are the workhorses inside these environments.</p> <p>When your industrial system is part of a botnet</p> <p>Dragos—which helps firms secure industrial control systems against ransomware, state-sponsored hackers, and potential saboteurs—recently performed a routine vulnerability assessment and found software advertised as password cracker for the DirectLogic 06, a PLC sold by Automation Direct. The software recovered the password, but not through the normal method of cracking the cryptographic hash. Instead, the software exploited a zero-day vulnerability in Automatic Direct PLCs that exposed the passcode.</p> <p>“Previous research targeting DirectLogic PLCs has resulted in successful cracking techniques,” Dragos researcher Sam Hanson wrote. “However, Dragos found that this exploit does not crack a scrambled version of the password as historically seen in popular exploitation frameworks. Instead, a specific byte sequence is sent by the malware dropper to a COM port.”</p>

The vulnerability, and a related one also found by Hanson, have now been patched and are tracked as CVE-2022-2033 and CVE-2022-2004. The latter vulnerability can recover passwords and send them to a remote hacker, bringing the severity rating to 7.5 out of a possible 10.

Besides recovering the password, the software Hanson analyzed also installed malware known as Sality. It made the infected system part of a botnet and monitored the clipboard of the infected workstation every half second for any data related to cryptocurrency wallet addresses.

“If seen, the hijacker replaces the address with one owned by the threat actor,” Hanson said. “This in-real-time hijacking is an effective way to steal cryptocurrency from users wanting to transfer funds and increases our confidence that the adversary is financially motivated.”

Hanson went on to say that he has found password crackers advertised online for a wide range of industrial software sold by other companies. They include:

Vendor and Asset	System Type
Automation Direct DirectLogic 06	PLC
Omron CP1H	PLC
Omron C200HX	PLC
Omron C200H	PLC
Omron CPM2*	PLC
Omron CPM1A	PLC
Omron CQM1H	PLC
Siemens S7-200	PLC
Siemens S7-200	Project File (*.mwp)
Siemens LOGO! 0AB6	PLC
ABB Codesys	Project File (*.pro)
Delta Automation DVP, ES, EX, SS2, EC Series	PLC
Fuji Electric POD UG	HMI
Fuji Electric Hakko	HMI
Mitsubishi Electric FX Series (3U and 3G)	PLC
Mitsubishi Electric Q02 Series	PLC
Mitsubishi Electric GT 1020 Series	HMI
Mitsubishi Electric GOT F930	HMI
Mitsubishi Electric GOT F940	HMI
Mitsubishi Electric GOT 1055	HMI
Pro-Face GP Pro-Face	HMI

Pro-Face GP	Project File (*.prw)
Vigor VB	PLC
Vigor VH	PLC
Weintek	HMI
Allen Bradley MicroLogix 1000	PLC
Panasonic NAIS F P0	PLC
Fatek FBe and FBs Series	PLC
IDEC Corporation HG2S-FF	HMI
LG K80S	PLC
LG K120S	PLC

Dragos tested only the malware targeting the DirectLogic devices, but a rudimentary analysis of a few samples indicated they also contained malware.

“In general, it appears there is an ecosystem for this type of software,” Hanson said. “Several websites and multiple social media accounts exist all touting their password ‘crackers.’”

The account is concerning because it illustrates the threat posed to many industrial control settings. The criminals behind the malware Dragos analyzed were after money, but there’s no reason more malicious hackers out to sabotage a dam, power plant, or similar facility couldn’t perform a similar intrusion with much more severe consequences.

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HEADLINE	07/15 TrickBot an organized, potent adversary
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/russian-cybercrime-syndicate-trickbot-organized-potent-adversary/
GIST	<p>On Feb. 21, just days before Russia launched its brutal invasion of Ukraine, someone with the username “fire” posted a message to one of the TrickBot cybercrime syndicate’s internal chat groups.</p> <p>“We are in a difficult situation,” fire wrote in an attempt to explain to others why they hadn’t been paid, and to ask for their patience. There had been “too many leaks,” among other circumstances, so “the boss has apparently decided to lay low.”</p> <p>Fire added that the future of the group was bleak. “There is no boss, no clarity or certainty about what we will do in the future, no money either.”</p> <p>The message was just one of roughly 250,000 communications analyzed by British cybersecurity firm Cyjax as part of a report published Friday that offers a detailed look at the inner workings of TrickBot, which refers to both a sophisticated trojan malware and the developers behind it.</p> <p>The @trickleaks Twitter account originally post the messages in batches. Its Twitter bio claims to “have evidence of FSB’s cooperation with members of the Trickbot criminal group (Wizard Spiders, Maze, Conti, Diavol, Ruyk).”</p> <p>The Cyjax report highlights the highly structured nature of the major Russian cybercrime group, a key reason they are able to generate tens of millions of dollars annually. The leaks also revealed reams of information about TrickBot members, Cyjax Intelligence Analyst Joe Wrieden wrote, including “where they are based, what real jobs they have held in the criminal organisation and commercial world as well, and in some cases, why the member joined the group.”</p>

But while the leak may have been a blow to the criminal cyber syndicate, and revealed the trouble in the group in the aftermath of the invasion, researchers say that TrickBot continues to be a menace, especially in Ukraine.

The group behind the @trickleaks account posted PDFs with detailed biographical information on alleged TrickBot members, which included full names, addresses and other personal information from a likely mix of open-source information and internal data held by TrickBot. Cyjax was able to download 27 such PDFs before they were deleted from the hosting service where they were posted.

Wrieden questioned why so much information was available on some of the group's members. "Perhaps these cybercriminals are aligned, affiliated, or controlled by a nation state protagonist which required this information," Wrieden wrote.

Altogether, he added, the leak is "over four times the size of the [Conti leaks](#) which was seen by some researchers as one of the most useful information dumps of the past few years."

Both the Conti leaks and the TrickBot leaks came about after [Conti posted a message to its website](#) pledging full support for the Russian government as it waged its assault on Ukraine. Conti, like other major cybercrime groups, is [thought to operate out of Russia](#) or in a Russian-friendly country, and did not attack Russian targets as a matter of policy.

Conti quickly walked back its message, but the damage was done in the eyes of some of its Ukrainian and other non-Russian members. A [Ukrainian researcher](#) with access to Conti's infrastructure leaked the Conti materials, but it's unknown who is behind the TrickBot leaks, the reports authors said.

Conti would go on to continue attacking targets for the next few months, and [TrickBot was thought to be shutting down its infrastructure](#), researchers concluded in late February, [just the latest time](#) the group was believed to be dead.

But on July 7, [IBM's Security X-Force research group published findings](#) suggesting the TrickBot syndicate had been "systematically attacking Ukraine" in the wake of the Russian invasion as part of "an unprecedented shift" that reflected some members allegiance to Russian goals.

"Wizard Spider is a business. And while the Conti leaks did a lot to disrupt one part of their business [Conti ransomware], other parts, like TrickBot, have continued to operate," said Allan Liska, an intelligence analyst at cybersecurity firm Recorded Future.

Wrieden concluded that the leaks' value is helping to understand what modern high-level cybercrime actually looks like.

"The threat we face today is often depicted as hundreds of individual groups, each with different tactics, techniques, and procedures vying for money and notoriety," he wrote. "From what we have seen, it appears this claim is highly exaggerated."

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HEADLINE	07/15 Microsoft: NKorea hackers target SMBs
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/microsoft-north-korean-hackers-target-smbs-h0lygh0st-ransomware
GIST	<p>Microsoft this week sounded the alarm on a North Korean threat actor using the H0lyGh0st ransomware in attacks targeting small and midsize businesses worldwide.</p> <p>The hackers, who call themselves H0lyGh0st and are tracked by Microsoft as DEV-0530, have been using ransomware since at least June 2021, and have successfully compromised numerous organizations since September 2021.</p>

Similar to other ransomware gangs out there, the group engages in double extortion, threatening to release sensitive information stolen from victims unless a ransom is paid.

DEV-0530 appears connected to the North Korea-linked advanced persistent threat (APT) actor DarkSeoul (also known as Plutonium and Andariel), based on email communication and on DEV-0530's use of tools exclusive to DarkSeoul, the Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC) explains.

DEV-0530 is a financially-motivated adversary that primarily uses ransomware to achieve its goals. The group attempts to legitimize its actions by claiming to help victims improve their security posture.

However, the threat actor also threatens to make victim data public on social media unless a ransom is paid. On their Tor website, the miscreants offer a contact form so that victims can get in touch with them.

According to Microsoft, the activities of DEV-0530 partially overlap with those of DarkSeoul, an APT famous for [wreaking havoc in South Korea in 2013](#), and which was also observed [targeting organizations](#) in Europe and the United States.

"MSTIC has observed known DEV-0530 email accounts communicating with known PLUTONIUM attacker accounts. MSTIC has also observed both groups operating from the same infrastructure set, and even using custom malware controllers with similar names," Microsoft says.

The tech giant also noticed that the threat actor's activities are consistent with the UTC+9 time zone used in North Korea, but say that, despite similarities, DEV-0530 is a distinct group from DarkSeoul.

Microsoft says that North Korean threat actors' use of ransomware might be sanctioned by the country's government, to offset economic setbacks caused by the COVID-19 lockdown. However, it is equally possible that the adversary is using ransomware for personal gain, which could explain an "often-random selection of victims."

The H0lyGh0st ransomware is formed of two malware families, namely SiennaPurple (a BLTC_C variant written in C++) and SiennaBlue (HolyRS, HolyLock, and BLTC, all written in Go), both of which have been used in DEV-0530 attacks targeting Windows systems.

In June 2021, the threat actor was seen using the SiennaPurple family, which needs to be executed with administrative privileges on the target system. Between October 2021 and May 2022, the adversary used the Go-coded SiennaBlue ransomware variants. Since April 2022, DEV-0530 has been using the BTLC ransomware variant.

According to the tech giant, in November 2021 DEV-0530 successfully compromised several small-to-mid-sized businesses in the manufacturing, finance, education, and event and meeting planning sectors in multiple countries. Likely opportunistic, the attacks exploited vulnerabilities such as CVE-2022-26352 on public-facing web assets for initial access.

Following successful compromise, the attackers would exfiltrate "a full copy of the victims' files" and then move to encrypt the contents on the system, appending the .h0lyenc extension to impacted files. In addition to dropping a ransom note, the attackers emailed the victim to inform them that their data was stolen and encrypted by H0lyGh0st.

"Based on our investigation, the attackers frequently asked victims for anywhere from 1.2 to 5 Bitcoins. However, the attackers were usually willing to negotiate and, in some cases, lowered the price to less than one-third of the initial asking price. As of early July 2022, a review of the attackers' wallet transactions shows that they have not successfully extorted ransom payments from their victims," Microsoft notes.

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HEADLINE	07/15 Average: suspicious sites 6.5 times a day
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/average-american-suspicious-sites/

GIST	<p>Data generated by OnePoll from April 28 to May 3 2022 on behalf of AT&T shows that the average person happens upon a suspicious online site or social media account 6.5 times a day. The recent survey of 2000 general population Americans also found that 54% of consumers said they were unaware of the difference between active and passive security threats, with the majority being reactive as opposed to proactive about their password security. Of those surveyed, 42% still use the same password across multiple logins, an oversight that can lead to credential stuffing.</p> <p>The survey went on to state that less than 40% of those polled consider common cybersecurity risks, and only one-third are mindful of network intrusion and rogue mobile apps. Nearly half (45%) of consumers have even received a phone call from someone claiming to be from the government, a disconcerting finding given that 36% were more willing to reply to a message if it looks like it's from an official organization.</p> <p>In mitigating cybersecurity threats, Josh Goodell, vice president of Broadband Technology Management at AT&T, stated that "one way people can help mitigate their cybersecurity risks across the home is by using a VPN, or virtual private network, to encrypt their data and prevent potential hackers from tracking their online activity."</p> <p>Security risks are a troubling yet continuous issue in our digital environment, but the adoption of a more proactive posture while harnessing available security technology will help immensely in mitigating those risks, with Goodell affirming: "Combining your own proactive security habits with an internet service provider that offers security features such as identity monitoring, malicious site blocking and anti-virus scanning can help protect you against potential threats and provide peace of mind for your overall connected experience."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 Sandstorm APT trolls researchers on trail
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/sandworm-apt-trolls-researchers-on-its-trail-while-it-targets-ukraine
GIST	<p>The infamous Sandworm threat group operating out of Russia's military GRU unit has no qualms about taunting researchers when it finds it is being watched. Just ask Robert Lipovsky and his fellow researchers at ESET, who got the message loud and clear when they dissected one of Sandworm's newer malware variants earlier this year: The Sandworm attackers disguised the loader for one of its data-wiping variants as the IDAPro reverse-engineering tool — the very same tool the researchers had used to analyze the attackers' malware.</p> <p>Lipovsky, principal threat intelligence researcher at ESET, knew it was no coincidence. Sandworm most likely was brazenly — and sarcastically — making a point that the group knew ESET was on its trail. "There's no reason to use IDAPro" in an attack on an engineering substation because that's not a tool that would be used on that system, he explains. "It's fairly clear the attackers are fully aware we are onto them and blocking their threats. They are maybe trolling us, I would say."</p> <p>That wasn't the only message Sandworm seemed to be sending. The group also dropped a Trojan-ridden version of ESET's security software in its targeting of Ukrainian networks. "They were sending a message that they were aware we are doing our job protecting the users in Ukraine," Lipovsky says.</p> <p>Lipovsky was part of the ESET team that — along with Ukraine's computer emergency response team (CERT-UA) and Microsoft — in April blocked a cyberattack by Sandworm on an energy company in Ukraine using a new version of its game-changing Industroyer malware weapon, Industroyer2. Had it not been thwarted in time, the attack would have knocked several high-voltage substations from part of the nation's electric grid.</p> <p>Industroyer2 is a more custom version of the first iteration (Industroyer) that Sandworm unleashed in December 2016, temporarily knocking out power in parts of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. The Industroyer2 attack attempt in April also came with destructive disk-wiping tools designed to destroy</p>

engineering workstations running Windows, Linux, and Solaris, in an attempt to thwart recovery operations when the attackers' planned power blackout hit. Industroyer was the first known malware able to shut out the lights, and it can communicate with ICS hardware in electrical substations — circuit breakers and protective relays, for instance — via popular industrial network protocols.

Even after the high-profile foiling of the Industroyer2 attack attempt on Ukraine in April, Sandworm continues to relentlessly hammer at Ukraine's cyber defenses. "It didn't end with Industroyer2. It continues today," says Lipovsky, who with ESET senior malware researcher Anton Cherepanov will share [their insiders' view](#) of Sandworm and dissect the group's Industroyer2 malware [at Black Hat USA in Las Vegas next month](#).

"There are more wipers today ... and new execution chains being used," he says.

Most of the current attack attempts by Sandworm against Ukraine's infrastructure now carry disk-wiping weapons. "We've seen disruption activity [attempts] at an increased rates since February," he says, when Russia first invaded Ukraine. Intel-gathering via cyber-espionage attacks also has been active, he adds, noting that while Sandworm is the most prominent Russian threat actor targeting Ukraine, it's not the only one.

Industroyer2 up Close

In their Black Hat talk, Lipovsky and Cherepanov plan to reveal more technical details about Sandworm that haven't yet been made public, as well as share recommendations for utilities to defend against the nation-state group's attacks.

Lipovsky and his team describe Industroyer2 as a simpler, more streamlined version of the first version. Unlike the first Industroyer, Industroyer2 speaks just one OT protocol, IEC 104. The original version used four different industrial protocols. It's likely more efficient and focused that way: "[IEC 104 is] one of most common [OT] protocols and a regional thing" in Europe, he notes.

The disk-wiping capabilities with Industroyer2 eclipse that of the first version. "The first one was a framework with multiple components, and it was also calling additional modules that were there for wiping," he says. Industroyer2 is more "self-contained" and offers wipers as separate executables, he says, malware weapons that have been discovered in other recent cyber incidents.

[CaddyWiper](#) is the main disk wiper used with Industroyer2. Sandworm pointed CaddyWiper at a Ukrainian bank 24 hours before Russia invaded Ukraine in February, at a government agency in early April, and on some Windows workstations at the targeted Ukrainian energy firm. Sandworm also set destructive malware programs ORCSHRED, SOLOSHRED, and AWFULSHRED on Linux and Solaris workstations there. And, as a final touch, Sandworm had scheduled CaddyWiper to execute on April 8 as a way to erase all evidence of Industroyer2, but it was blocked.

Interestingly, Sandworm does not typically wipe domain controllers, so as not to disrupt its own foothold in the victim's network. "They wipe regular workstations to disrupt a target's operations, but they want to keep their presence once they've infiltrated an environment," Lipovsky says.

Even with all that ESET and other researchers now know about Industroyer2, there is still no full picture of the initial attack vector in the Industroyer2 attack on the Ukrainian energy firm. CERT-UA said the attack appeared to be in two stages, the first one likely in February of this year and the other in April, when the goal was to disconnect the electrical substations and sabotage the power operations on April 8.

Defense Against Industroyer, Sandworm

While Industroyer2 has been trained on Ukraine, its emergence has shaken the OT industry. "Industroyer was a wake-up call for the whole ICS community. This is a serious threat," Lipovsky says.

	<p>The playbook for protecting an OT network from Industroyer and related attacks isn't much different than others. "It's what we've always been saying: Have visibility into the environment; have EDR, XDR tools; multiple layers of security in the stack; and access controls," Lipovsky says.</p> <p>In their talk at Black Hat Lipovsky and Cherepanov also will share EDR rules, configuration suggestions to stop lateral movement, and rules for Snort and YARA tools</p> <p>They also plan to reiterate that engineering workstations in OT networks have become major targets, so they have to be part of the security equation. "A lot of SCADA software and monitoring is happening on regular workstations that run Windows or Linux. These machines should have the appropriate security measures and solutions that are multilayered," including running EDR or XDR tools, he says.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/16 Tiny Mantis botnet powerful DDoS attacks
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/tiny-mantis-botnet-launch-ddos-attacks-than-mirai/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Mantis Botnet launched 3,000 DDoS attacks in one month using only 5,000 small bots after which Cloudflare dubbed the botnet as “the most powerful botnet to date.”</p> <p>According to Cloudflare content distribution network, a botnet named after a small shrimp is so powerful that it has launched the biggest ever DDoS attacks. Dubbed Mantis, the botnet has thus far targeted around 1,000 Cloudflare customers within the past few weeks.</p> <p>The company revealed that it thwarted a brief but record-shattering DDoS attack peaking at 26 million rps (requests per second) in June. Ever since that attack, the internet infrastructure company has been tracking Mantis.</p> <p>If you wonder why Cloudflare named it after the laser-legged Mantis, the company revealed that the botnet is similar to Meris, therefore the name reflects its origin and the capability to hit hard and fast.</p> <p>Mantis Doesn't Use IoTs</p> <p>Cloudflare explained in its blog post that the Mantis botnet comprises nearly five thousand compromised machines. It mainly hijacks virtual servers and machines hosted by cloud firms instead of using low-bandwidth IoT devices like routers and DVRs.</p> <p>It is worth noting that the Meris botnet used IoT devices, including hijacked MikroTik routers to attack popular websites. The botnet was also behind the massive DDoS attack on Yandex, a popular Russian search engine and technology firm.</p> <p>In the same manner, the Mantis botnet operates through a “small fleet of” bots that can quickly generate massive force and launch large-scale HTTP DDoS attacks, which are actually more “computationally expensive” as the attacker has to establish an encrypted transport layer security connection. Thus, it seems like the beginning of the next phase in Meris botnet evolution.</p> <p>Targets of Mantis Botnet</p> <p>Cloudflare reported that in June, the Mantis botnet launched more than 3,000 HTTP DDoS attacks, and 36% of these attacks were targeted against the telco and internet sectors, game publishers, and news organizations. Additionally, it targeted French organizations’ websites, gambling sites, and e-commerce platforms.</p> <p>Furthermore, nearly 20% of Mantis botnet targets were organizations in the US, and 15% were Russian organizations. Around 5% of the targets were identified in:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. India 2. China 3. Brazil 4. Latvia

5. Turkey
6. France
7. Poland
8. Ukraine
9. Cyprus
10. Canada
11. Sweden
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Mantis vs Mirai

Mired in controversy, the Mirai botnet has made headlines time and again. The Mirai botnet was introduced to the world after its first-ever attack harnessed over 100,000 devices to launch a [massive DDoS against Dyn](#), a company that provides DNS services. The DDoS attack on Dyn was the largest DDoS attack on record at that time, clocking in at 1.2 Tbps.

However, the Mantis botnet is different from Mirai in that it relies on vulnerabilities in routers and other connected devices rather than [hijacked IoT devices](#). This makes it more difficult to defend against, as there are many more potential targets.

However, Cloudflare was able to identify and block malicious traffic before it reached its targets. This successful defense against the Mantis botnet shows that companies are beginning to learn from the Mirai attack and are taking steps to protect themselves.

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HEADLINE	07/15 DHS report: Log4j vulnerabilities, response
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/dhs-report-log4j-vulnerabilities/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>This week the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released the Cyber Safety Review Board's (CSRB) first report into the December 2021 Log4j event, where a number of vulnerabilities were reported with this Java-based logging framework.</p> <p>The report's methodology included a mixture of interviews and requests for information over a 90-day period, engaging with approximately 80 organizations and individuals comprising software developers, end users, security professionals and companies. This was to ensure the board spoke with multiple representatives from a wide variety of viewpoints and to "capture the nuances of how different attack surfaces are designed and defended."</p> <p>The report stated that while standardized and reusable "building blocks" are useful for creating and scaling software, this means that any potential vulnerability can be unintentionally integrated into multiple software packages, putting any organization that uses those programs at risk. The report suggested that even though Log4j remains a risk, the government-wide response helped mitigate the vulnerability. The board also identified the need for additional funding to support the mostly volunteer open-source software security community.</p> <p>Industry specialists, such as Michael Skelton, senior director of security operations at Bugcrowd, said of Log4j: "Dealing with it is a marathon, one that will take years to resolve. Java and Log4j are prevalent everywhere, not only in core projects but in dependencies that other projects rely on, making detection and mitigation not as simple an exercise as it may be with other vulnerabilities."</p> <p>John Bambenek, principal threat hunter at Netenrich, was more critical of the report's timing, believing that "anyone still vulnerable is highly unlikely to read this report or in much of a position to do anything about</p>

it if they did. Most of the American economy is small to medium businesses that almost always never have a CISO and likely not even a CIO. Until we find ways to make the public without security budgets safe, no high-level list of best practices will move the ball significantly.”

The CSRB’s report went on to state that, fortunately, it is unaware of any significant Log4j-based attacks on critical infrastructure assets or systems and that attempts to compromise Log4j occurred at a lower level than many specialists anticipated. However, the report stresses that the Log4j event is “not over” and remains an “endemic vulnerability” for many years, with significant risk remaining.

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HEADLINE	07/17 Emerging new supply-chain attack tactic
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/hackers-spoof-commit-metadata-false-github-repositories/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Checkmarx security researchers have warned about an emerging new supply chain attack tactic involving spoofed metadata commits to present malicious GitHub repositories as legit.</p> <p>According to the IT security researchers at Checkmarx, this attack technique allows threat actors to deceive developers into using malicious code. In the Git version control system, commits are vital elements as these record every change made to the documents, the timeline of change, and who made the change.</p> <p>Moreover, each commit boasts a unique hash or ID. Developers must remain cautious as threat actors can falsify some data from GitHub repositories to enhance their track record and make them appealing.</p> <p>How can Commit Metadata Deceive Developers?</p> <p>Researchers identified that a threat actor could tamper with commit metadata to make a repository appear older than it is. Or else, they can deceive developers by promoting the repositories as trusted since reputable contributors are maintaining them. It is also possible to spoof the committer’s identity and attribute the commit to a genuine GitHub account.</p> <p>For your information, with open source software, developers can create apps faster and even skip third-party’s code auditing if they are sure that the source of software is reliable. They can choose GitHub repositories maintained actively, or their contributors are trustworthy.</p> <p>Checkmarx researchers explained in their blog post that threat actors could manipulate the timestamps of the commits, which are listed on GitHub. Fake commits can also be generated automatically and added to the user’s GitHub activity graph, allowing the attacker to make it appear active on the platform for a long time. The activity graph displays activity on private and public repositories, making it impossible to discredit the fake commits.</p> <p>“This deception technique can be hard to detect as well.” <i>Checkmarx</i></p> <p>Attack Tactics Explained</p> <p>Threat actors will retrieve the email ID of the target account, which is typically hidden if the operator has enabled this feature. Using specific commands, the malicious user can replace the original email and username with the spoofed version in the Git CLI to improve the repository’s reputation.</p> <p>It is worth noting that the impersonated user won’t receive any notification that their identity is used for nefarious purposes. In order to present the project as trustable, threat actors may use this technique multiple times, include reputed contributors to the repository’s contributor section, and make the project appear highly legit.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/18 FOIA: how DHS tracks smartphones
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/5d3gmb/documents-show-dhs-tracks-smartphones-across-the-country

Recently released documents show in new detail how parts of the Department of Homeland Security have been using surveillance tools built on smartphone location data as part of investigations across the United States, including in multiple field offices and for a variety of different crimes.

[The documents](#), obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) [as part of a Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\) lawsuit](#), provide the clearest picture yet of where, and why, law enforcement agencies [have used tools like Venntel](#) and Locate X, which are based on location data [harvested from ordinary smartphone apps installed on peoples' phones](#). The documents also show that some parts of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) have used one of the tools to help state and local law enforcement.

Field offices or locations included in the emails that indicate they have had access to Venntel or Locate X include Knoxville, New York, Detroit, El Paso, Houston, Miami, Phoenix, Seattle, San Antonio, and Washington DC. Another email indicates that HSI's Office of Intelligence owns all of the licenses and then files them out to the various field offices.

Venntel is based on data gathered by advertising firm Gravy Analytics. Venntel then repackages that location data and sells access to it to law enforcement agencies. Babel Street, another company, also repackages Venntel's data and incorporates it into its own product called Locate X, which it also sells to government bodies. By purchasing the data from a private business, law enforcement agencies have used the data without a warrant. This is despite privacy and legal experts, including those at the ACLU, believe that such data falls under protections offered by the Fourth Amendment.

According to the emails, HSI officials have contacted each other for assistance in having searches run in the Venntel system. In one email, an official writes to a colleague and says "Anyway, if possible, can you please forward the below dates/times/addresses to your Venntel POC [point of contact] to run?"

That collaboration has extended beyond HSI officials contacting one another and also includes local agencies. "SAC DC was one of the major users of the system supporting our state and local partners," an email written by a chief intelligence officer from HSI reads. The official wrote the email shortly [after the Wall Street Journal first reported](#) in February 2020 that the DHS was using Venntel.

The official goes on to spell out which local agencies requested their help with the Venntel system, including "Prince William County, Fairfax, Richmond PD, Newport News, Northern Virginia Gang Task Force, Chesterfield PD, Henrico County, Norfolk PD, Fauquier County Sheriff Department and some small agencies."

Various officials have contacted each other across HSI to get more context on the surveillance system. In an August 2019 email, one official writes that they spoke to an Assistant U.S. Attorney in North Carolina who worked with HSI agents who used Venntel.

The emails include use cases that an HSI official writes that they have location data products on, such as human, narcotics, and weapons and ammunition smuggling. In a February 2020 email, an official wrote that HSI's Venntel licenses are for criminal investigations and not immigration enforcement (the earlier *Wall Street Journal* article focused in part on Customs and Border Protections use of the tool for immigration enforcement).

Another document says that "because query results do not produce the name or other contact information of an individual, ICE users must serve the geolocation service provider with a subpoena to obtain the identity of the individual that owns the device." It is not clear if Venntel or Babel Street would necessarily have this information. Neither company responded to a request for comment.

The tools are not always effective, though. In one email, an official wrote that "feedback on Locate X has been mixed." Officials from HSI Detroit found the system had significant gaps in its collection and so the investigators "derived little value from the tool." Officials in HSI Nashville meanwhile used the tool "to provide investigative leads in multiple investigations to include a murder case."

	<p>Nathan Freed Wessler, deputy director of the ACLU’s Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, said in a statement that “The Supreme Court has made clear that because our cell phone location history reveals so many ‘privacies of life,’ it is deserving of full Fourth Amendment protection.”</p> <p>“Yet, here we see data brokers and government agencies tying themselves in knots trying to explain how people can lack an expectation of privacy in such obviously personal and sensitive location information. With the potential for abuse so high, Congress must step in to definitively end this practice,” he added.</p> <p>Senator Ron Wyden has proposed legislation, called the <i>Fourth Amendment is Not For Sale Act</i>, that would require law enforcement and intelligence agencies to seek warrants before sourcing such data.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Concerns as AI language skills grow
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/ai-language-skills-grow-scientists-concerns-86972278
GIST	<p>The tech industry’s latest artificial intelligence constructs can be pretty convincing if you ask them what it feels like to be a sentient computer, or maybe just a dinosaur or squirrel. But they’re not so good — and sometimes dangerously bad — at handling other seemingly straightforward tasks.</p> <p>Take, for instance, GPT-3, a Microsoft-controlled system that can generate paragraphs of human-like text based on what it’s learned from a vast database of digital books and online writings. It’s considered one of the most advanced of a new generation of AI algorithms that can converse, generate readable text on demand and even produce novel images and video.</p> <p>Among other things, GPT-3 can write up most any text you ask for — a cover letter for a zookeeping job, say, or a Shakespearean-style sonnet set on Mars. But when Pomona College professor Gary Smith asked it a simple but nonsensical question about walking upstairs, GPT-3 muffed it.</p> <p>“Yes, it is safe to walk upstairs on your hands if you wash them first,” the AI replied.</p> <p>These powerful and power-chugging AI systems, technically known as “large language models” because they’ve been trained on a huge body of text and other media, are already getting baked into customer service chatbots, Google searches and “auto-complete” email features that finish your sentences for you. But most of the tech companies that built them have been secretive about their inner workings, making it hard for outsiders to understand the flaws that can make them a source of misinformation, racism and other harms.</p> <p>“They’re very good at writing text with the proficiency of human beings,” said Teven Le Scao, a research engineer at the AI startup Hugging Face. “Something they’re not very good at is being factual. It looks very coherent. It’s almost true. But it’s often wrong.”</p> <p>That’s one reason a coalition of AI researchers co-led by Le Scao — with help from the French government — launched a new large language model Tuesday that’s supposed to serve as an antidote to closed systems such as GPT-3. The group is called BigScience and their model is BLOOM, for the BigScience Large Open-science Open-access Multilingual Language Model. Its main breakthrough is that it works across 46 languages, including Arabic, Spanish and French — unlike most systems that are focused on English or Chinese.</p> <p>It’s not just Le Scao’s group aiming to open up the black box of AI language models. Big Tech company Meta, the parent of Facebook and Instagram, is also calling for a more open approach as it tries to catch up to the systems built by Google and OpenAI, the company that runs GPT-3.</p> <p>“We’ve seen announcement after announcement after announcement of people doing this kind of work, but with very little transparency, very little ability for people to really look under the hood and peek into how these models work,” said Joelle Pineau, managing director of Meta AI.</p>

Competitive pressure to build the most eloquent or informative system — and profit from its applications — is one of the reasons that most tech companies keep a tight lid on them and don't collaborate on community norms, said Percy Liang, an associate computer science professor at Stanford who directs its Center for Research on Foundation Models.

“For some companies this is their secret sauce,” Liang said. But they are often also worried that losing control could lead to irresponsible uses. As AI systems are increasingly able to write health advice websites, high school term papers or political screeds, misinformation can proliferate and it will get harder to know what's coming from a human or a computer.

Meta recently launched a new language model called OPT-175B that uses publicly available data — from heated commentary on Reddit forums to the archive of U.S. patent records and a trove of emails from the Enron corporate scandal. Meta says its openness about the data, code and research logbooks makes it easier for outside researchers to help identify and mitigate the bias and toxicity that it picks up by ingesting how real people write and communicate.

“It is hard to do this. We are opening ourselves for huge criticism. We know the model will say things we won't be proud of,” Pineau said.

While most companies have set their own internal AI safeguards, Liang said what's needed are broader community standards to guide research and decisions such as when to release a new model into the wild.

It doesn't help that these models require so much computing power that only giant corporations and governments can afford them. BigScience, for instance, was able to train its models because it was offered access to France's powerful Jean Zay supercomputer near Paris.

The trend for ever-bigger, ever-smarter AI language models that could be “pre-trained” on a wide body of writings took a big leap in 2018 when Google introduced a system known as BERT that uses a so-called “transformer” technique that compares words across a sentence to predict meaning and context. But what really impressed the AI world was GPT-3, released by San Francisco-based startup OpenAI in 2020 and soon after exclusively licensed by Microsoft.

GPT-3 led to a boom in creative experimentation as AI researchers with paid access used it as a sandbox to gauge its performance — though without important information about the data it was trained on.

OpenAI has broadly described its training sources in a research paper, and has also publicly reported its efforts to grapple with potential abuses of the technology. But BigScience co-leader Thomas Wolf said it doesn't provide details about how it filters that data, or give access to the processed version to outside researchers.

“So we can't actually examine the data that went into the GPT-3 training,” said Wolf, who is also a chief science officer at Hugging Face. “The core of this recent wave of AI tech is much more in the dataset than the models. The most important ingredient is data and OpenAI is very, very secretive about the data they use.”

Wolf said that opening up the datasets used for language models helps humans better understand their biases. A multilingual model trained in Arabic is far less likely to spit out offensive remarks or misunderstandings about Islam than one that's only trained on English-language text in the U.S., he said.

One of the newest AI experimental models on the scene is Google's LaMDA, which also incorporates speech and is so impressive at responding to conversational questions that one Google engineer argued it was approaching consciousness — a claim that got him suspended from his job last month.

Colorado-based researcher Janelle Shane, author of the AI Weirdness blog, has spent the past few years creatively testing these models, especially GPT-3 — often to humorous effect. But to point out the

	<p>absurdity of thinking these systems are self-aware, she recently instructed it to be an advanced AI but one which is secretly a Tyrannosaurus rex or a squirrel.</p> <p>“It is very exciting being a squirrel. I get to run and jump and play all day. I also get to eat a lot of food, which is great,” GPT-3 said, after Shane asked it for a transcript of an interview and posed some questions.</p> <p>Shane has learned more about its strengths, such as its ease at summarizing what’s been said around the internet about a topic, and its weaknesses, including its lack of reasoning skills, the difficulty of sticking with an idea across multiple sentences and a propensity for being offensive.</p> <p>“I wouldn’t want a text model dispensing medical advice or acting as a companion,” she said. “It’s good at that surface appearance of meaning if you are not reading closely. It’s like listening to a lecture as you’re falling asleep.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/18 Spyware hits Thai pro-democracy activists
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/researchers-thai-pro-democracy-activists-hit-spyware-86989924
GIST	<p>BANGKOK -- Cybersecurity researchers reported details Monday of cases where Thai activists involved in the country’s pro-democracy protests had their cell phones or other devices infected and attacked with government-sponsored spyware.</p> <p>Investigators of the internet watchdog groups Citizen Lab, Thailand’s Internet Law Reform Dialogue, or iLaw, and Digital Reach said at least 30 individuals — including activists, scholars and people working with civil society groups — were targeted by an unnamed government entity or entities for surveillance with Pegasus, a spyware produced by the Israeli-based cybersecurity company NSO Group.</p> <p>The reports from the two groups named many of those targeted, confirming earlier reports of the surveillance, which John Scott-Railton of Citizen Lab said shows that governments are exploiting their ability to buy technologies designed to fight crime and terrorism to spy on critics and other private citizens.</p> <p>“Citizen Lab believes there is a fundamental challenge for civil society,” John Scott-Railton of Citizen Lab said in an online presentation at a briefing in Bangkok.</p> <p>The attacks on the individuals’ devices spanned from Oct. 2020 to Nov. 2021, a timing “highly relevant to specific Thai political events” since they took place over the period of time when pro-democracy protests erupted across the country.</p> <p>But Scott-Railton said Citizen Lab, which exposes digital espionage campaigns and insecure software, believed there was still an active Pegasus operator in Thailand.</p> <p>Those whose devices were attacked were either involved in the protests in 2020-2021, or were publicly critical of the Thai monarchy. Lawyers who defended the activists also were under such digital surveillance, the researchers said.</p> <p>The Pegasus spyware is known for “zero-click exploits,” which means it can be installed remotely onto a target’s phone without the target having to click any links or download software.</p> <p>The spyware can obtain any data on the devices, including contact lists and group chats, making it highly effective against political groups and movements, Scott-Railton said.</p> <p>NSO Group’s products, including the Pegasus software, are typically licensed only to government intelligence and law enforcement agencies to investigate terrorism and serious crime, according to the</p>

company's website. Citizen Lab and other cyber security researchers have tracked the spyware to 45 countries.

In a separate report Monday, the human rights group Amnesty International reiterated its call for a global moratorium on the sale of spyware.

"The unlawful targeted surveillance of human rights defenders and civil society is a tool of repression. It is time to clamp down on this industry that continues to operate in the shadows," Amnesty Tech's deputy director Danna Ingleton said in a statement.

The company has rejected accusations that its snooping software helped lead to the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, perhaps the highest-profile case so far. It maintains that its sales undergo a rigorous ethical vetting process and that Pegasus spyware is sold to governments only for security purposes.

In November, the U.S. government blacklisted NSO Group and Apple sued it and notified Pegasus victims. Facebook has sued NSO Group over the use of a somewhat similar exploit that allegedly intruded via its globally popular encrypted WhatsApp messaging app.

The reports by Citizen Lab and iLaw do not accuse any specific government actor but say the use of Pegasus indicates the presence of a government operator. When news that dissidents had been targeted first surfaced in November 2021, the government denied the allegations.

Apple said it sought a permanent injunction to ban NSO Group from using any Apple software, services or devices to "to prevent further abuse and harm to its users."

Apple's notifications to customers of spyware infections are a crucial part of a defense strategy against such digital surveillance, Scott-Railton said.

"Apple did something remarkable by notifying the recipients of this suspected targeting. If you look at the infection online, it stopped after Apple's notification," he said. "It was a very consequential thing."

The cybersecurity experts said that turning off and restarting a device can break the spyware's digital connection. Security updates also have helped to close the loopholes such attackers exploit.

"Layering up defenses on devices is very important," Scott-Railton said. "Anything is better than nothing."

But the spyware is constantly being updated and it is designed to be difficult to spot, facilitating surveillance by governments that have found it a useful tool for suppressing dissent.

Thailand's student-led pro-democracy movement ramped up activities in 2020, largely in reaction to the continuing influence of the military in government and hyper-royalist sentiment.

The movement was able to attract crowds of as many as 20,000-30,000 people in Bangkok in 2020 and had followings in major cities and universities.

"There is longstanding evidence showing Pegasus presence in Thailand, indicating that the government would likely have had access to Pegasus during the period in question," researchers said in the report. The over 30 individuals targeted were also "of intense interest to the Thai government."

The army in 2014 overthrew an elected government, and Prayuth Chan-ocha, the coup leader, was named prime minister after a 2019 general election put in power a military-backed political party. Protesters have campaigned for Prayuth and his government to step down and demanded reforms to make the monarchy more accountable and to amend the constitution to make it more democratic.

HEADLINE	07/16 Cryptomining firms in rising energy use
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/jul/16/cryptomining-energy-use-investigation-carbon-emissions
GIST	<p>The largest US cryptomining companies have the capacity to use as much electricity as nearly every home in Houston, Texas; energy use that is contributing to rising utility bills, according to an investigation by Democratic lawmakers.</p> <p>Cryptomining is a highly energy intensive process involving the use of specialized computers running constantly to solve complex math problems in order to create new virtual coins.</p> <p>Energy use in the industry is greater than that of entire countries. The US has become the center of cryptomining after it was banned in China. More than a third of the global computing power dedicated to mining bitcoin, the largest cryptocurrency, comes from the US, Senator Elizabeth Warren and five other Democrats reported in a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency.</p> <p>“The results of our investigation ... are disturbing ... revealing that cryptominers are large energy users that account for a significant – and rapidly growing – amount of carbon emissions,” the letter states. “It is imperative that your agencies work together to address the lack of information about cryptomining’s energy use and environmental impacts.”</p> <p>The congressional Democrats have asked the EPA and the Department of Energy to require cryptominers to disclose emissions and energy use, noting that regulators know little about the full environmental impact of the industry.</p> <p>The lawmakers solicited information from seven of the largest US cryptomining companies, including Stronghold, Greenidge, Bit Digital, Bitfury, Riot, BitDeer and Marathon, about their energy sources and consumption and the climate impacts of their operations. The data revealed that the industry is using a substantial amount of electricity, ramping up production and creating significant carbon emissions at a time when the US needs to drastically reduce emissions to combat the climate crisis.</p> <p>Emissions data from three companies, Bit Digital, Greenidge and Stronghold, indicated their operations create 1.6m tons of CO2 annually, an amount produced by nearly 360,000 cars. Their environmental impact is significant despite industry claims about clean energy use and climate commitments, the lawmakers wrote.</p> <p>“Bitcoin miners are using huge quantities of electricity that could be used for other priority end uses that contribute to our electrification and climate goals, such as replacing home furnaces with heat pumps,” the letter states.</p> <p>“The current energy use of cryptomining is resulting in large amounts of carbon emissions and other adverse air quality impacts, as well as impacts to the electric grid.”</p> <p>The power demands of the industry are also coming at a cost to consumers, the letter states, citing a study that found cryptomining operations in upstate New York led to a rise in electric bills by roughly \$165m for small businesses and \$79m for individuals.</p> <p>In Texas, which has become a cryptomining hub, the industry is expected to continue to expand significantly in the coming years, increasing the amount of electrical load to nearly a third of the grid’s current maximum capacity over the next four years and straining the system, according to a report from the Verge.</p> <p>“The more crypto mining that comes into the state, the higher the residents should expect the electricity prices to become,” Eric Hittinger, a professor at Rochester Institute of Technology, told the outlet.</p> <p>The cryptocurrency market has crashed in recent months, dropping in value from more than \$3tn in November 2021 to less than \$1tn.</p>

Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	07/15 SDF: ISIS plans attack on al-Hol camp
SOURCE	https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/15072022
GIST	<p>ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - Mazloun Abdi, General Commander of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), warned on Friday that the Islamic State (ISIS) is planning to attack the notorious al-Hol camp in northeast Syria (Rojava) if Turkey launches a new offensive against the SDF, based on intelligence shared by the global coalition against the group.</p> <p>Turkey has in recent months renewed threats to carry out a fresh military operation against the SDF in northern Syria's Manbij and Tal Rifaat towns in a bid to complete the 30 kilometer "safe zone" it began creating along its southern borders in recent years.</p> <p>"If such an offensive takes place, the fight against ISIS will be badly affected. It will also put the prisons [holding ISIS members] at risk. We cannot protect them. The [security of] al-Hol camp will be at risk as well. We are well-informed that ISIS has plans for such attacks. If the [Turkish] offensive takes place, they [ISIS] will launch a extensive campaign against our forces," Abdi told reporters during a rare press conference in Hasaka on Friday.</p> <p>"We have been informed by the global coalition that ISIS is making preparations to attack al-Hol camp," he added.</p> <p>The SDF is the main ally of the US-led global coalition against the ISIS on the ground in Syria.</p> <p>"The performance of our forces against ISIS has slashed by half. In May, we carried out 73 activities against ISIS but in June this was down to 30 activities," said the Kurdish commander.</p> <p>ISIS controlled swathes of Syrian land in 2014 but it was announced territorially defeated by the SDF in 2019. The Kurdish forces arrested thousands of ISIS fighters in the group's last bastion, Baghouz, and resided their wives and children in al-Hol camp in Hasaka. The camp currently holds around 56,000 people - mostly ISIS-affiliated women and children of different nationalities - according to UN figures.</p> <p>At least 25 people have been killed in the camp since the start of this year, according to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR). ISIS sleeper cells have been blamed for most of them.</p> <p>Kurdish forces have taken Turkey's threats seriously and begun making preparations to encounter the Turkish army and its Syrian proxies.</p> <p>Turkey has launched two offensives against Kurdish fighters in Syria since 2018. It alleges that the fighters are allied with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an armed group fighting for the increased rights of Kurds in Turkey and is viewed as a terrorist organization by Ankara.</p> <p>Abdi also told reporters that the SDF is well-prepared for a possible offensive although they do not want war.</p> <p>Russia, Syria, and the United Nations have all called on Turkey to refrain from embarking on military escalation in northeastern Syria.</p> <p>The United States has also opposed a potential operation by Turkey several times.</p> <p>Dana Stroul, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East, said during an online</p>

	<p>discussion organized by the US-based Middle East Institute late Wednesday that Washington opposes Turkey's plan to attack Kurdish forces.</p> <p>"At this point, we are opposed to this operation, and we have made very clear that that sort of operation near us is going to introduce concerns about US and coalition forces protection and concerns about backtracking on the progress we have made against ISIS," she said.</p> <p>Ankara and Moscow signed an agreement in October 2019 which was approved by the SDF as well. As per the deal, Turkey would suspend its military offensive which it launched earlier in the month in return of SDF's withdrawal to 30 kilometers deep into the Syrian land. Turkey and the Kurdish forces have since blamed one another for failing to implement the agreement.</p> <p>Abdi said that Turkey and its Syrian proxies carried out 1,630 artillery attacks against their forces, tried to seize land six times but were repelled, killed six civilians in seven drone attacks and conducted 22 drone attacks against the SDF in June.</p> <p>"This proves that it violated the agreement," he added.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 Accelerationist guide: attack electrical grid
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/accelerationist-guide-calls-for-metcalf-style-attacks-on-sitting-duck-electricity-infrastructure/
GIST	<p>An accelerationist handbook being shared among extremist Telegram channels calls for shooters to bypass softer targets in favor of causing chaotic blackouts by emulating on a broader scale an unsolved sniper attack on a California transmission substation.</p> <p>The cover of the 14-page PDF features a depiction of a masked and hooded gunman wielding a semiautomatic handgun with a suppressor affixed and wearing panoramic night-vision goggles. In the branches of a swastika behind the gunman are depictions of acts of violence including three people being hanged, a group of buildings ablaze, and a police car on fire next to a figure holding an incendiary weapon.</p> <p>The document begins by asserting it is not a text aimed at radicalizing new adherents, as the author(s) assume that readers are already committed to "doing what you can to strike a blow to this system."</p> <p>While lauding with racist language "noble acts of violence" perpetrated by white supremacists, it brands the mass shooting in May at a supermarket in a Black area of Buffalo, N.Y., as "treating symptoms of the cancer, not the cause," and argues that attackers should choose targets "that do the most damage to the system and spark revolution and chaos."</p> <p>"So long as the power turns on, the status quo, the downward decline of our race, and the increase in nonwhites in our lands will carry on unhindered," the guide states, vowing to steer adherents to "more fruitful acts that will REALLY harm the system and brings us closer to the collapse that is needed for our race to once again thrive on this planet."</p> <p>The document refers to the power grid as "the main thing that keeps the anti-White system going" and calls power distribution substations "sitting ducks, worthy prey" that are "largely unprotected and often in remote locations," setting the stage for a spree of attacks.</p> <p>The 2013 incident in which multiple gunmen opened fire on the Pacific Gas and Electric Company's Metcalf Transmission Substation south of San Jose, Calif., causing more than \$15 million in damage to 17 transformers, is commonly referenced on social media by domestic extremists — especially accelerationists and ecofascists — as an example of how to inflict damage on electricity infrastructure with the goal of hastening governmental and societal collapse. There have been no arrests in the attack, and there was not significant impact on customers' power.</p>

The new accelerationist guide theorizes that the power grid could be “crippled” over a large area if three similar substations were struck simultaneously or within days of each other with “armor piercing rounds,” arguing that with an extended blackout “all hell will break lose [sic]” and white supremacists would be poised to take control. Referencing the practice of extremists bestowing “sainthood” upon mass shooters who meet certain criteria, the document declares that an extremist who successfully attacks the power grid would be revered “above Sainthood when the lights don’t turn back on and we are plunged into urban warfare.”

The guide also mentions “telecommunications/Internet, oil transportation/pipelines, water lines, and similar things” as being prime targets because “they allow for all that we hate and despise” by supporting a diverse population.

As the document declares that Metcalf-style sniper attacks would be “unquestionably more effective” than a grocery store mass shooting, the pages’ background shows news images of fires at various electricity substations.

The guide continues by counseling extremists in conducting assassinations against figures other than “low hanging fruit,” using the Manson Family murders as their example of an attack suitable in “barbarity and gruesomeness” and advising attackers to “let hatred be personified by your actions.” The document also encourages “urban guerrilla sniping” with 1966 UT Austin clock tower shooter Charles Whitman used as an example of a sniper who blended into his surroundings. In a subsequent section on “urban camouflage,” the guide encourages extremists to “learn from the IRA’s successful examples of insurgency, especially if you are meeting with a small group of comrades”; that page also includes a photo of the car used in the 2002 D.C. sniper attacks while advocating that shooters use similar tactics.

Attacks against cellular towers are also encouraged — with the accelerationist guide calling them “towers of hell” — along with satellite broadcasting systems.

The document concludes with a call for gas or firearms attacks against “Jewish think tanks” and places crosshairs over a photo of Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) speaking at an Anti-Defamation League event.

In January, a Department of Homeland Security memo warned that domestic violent extremists including white supremacists and accelerationists continue to aspire to attack the power grid utilizing encrypted messaging platforms and simple tactics that could make a plot harder to detect in the planning stages.

The Office of Intelligence and Analysis document produced at the request of energy-sector stakeholders said that the dispersed nature of electricity infrastructure — with more than 6,400 power plants, 55,000 substations, and 450,000 miles of high-voltage transmission lines serviced by 3,000 companies — leads extremists to believe that they will have breathing room to commit an attack and escaped undetected, perceptions “likely reinforced” by the Metcalf attack.

Since at least 2020, domestic violent extremists have developed “credible, specific plans” to attack energy infrastructure, noting the downstream affects that taking out power would have on other critical infrastructure sectors. Even small-scale attacks, which are more likely without insider help or “significant technical knowledge,” pose risks to operations or personnel, the memo noted.

One of the cases cited by DHS I&A was the [indictment](#) last year that alleges a quartet of neo-Nazi accelerationists — some with military experience — “discussed their plans to take out the power grid,” including “a handwritten list of approximately one dozen intersections and places in Idaho and surrounding states” that “contained a transformer, substation, or other component of the power grid for the northwest United States, that if destroyed could cause damage exceeding \$100,000 to the power grid.” Also noted was the 2020 case in which a trio of professed Boogaloo adherents allegedly [plotted](#) to attack a power substation in Las Vegas as part of a wider accelerationist plot to stoke violence and chaos in the city.

	<p>Online narratives have also been attempting to inspire physical attacks on energy infrastructure with a range of tactics adapted to the perpetrator’s skillset, the memo stated. As HSToday previously reported, a neo-Nazi National Socialist Order video posted on Telegram last year used simple animation to encourage followers to identify allies and enemies and finally act – and the first “act” depicted an individual chucking an incendiary device at a power substation that subsequently bursts into flames. The video encouraged followers to educate themselves with books such as <i>The Turner Diaries</i> before attacking. The Base, another neo-Nazi group, in New Jersey distributed a 2019 propaganda image showing two members saluting in front of power lines.</p> <p>One social media account that was sharing accelerationist memes and references to the Boogaloo Bois posted an animated meme depicting a masked shooter in front of a power substation to the tune of “Electric Avenue.” Another meme posted on YouTube in April 2020 and circulated in other online forums asked people to “repost if you would dismantle the electrical transmission grid with your male followers” and included a short video showing an unknown individual blowtorching the leg of a transmission tower.</p> <p>A Joint Intelligence Bulletin released late last year from DHS, FBI and the National Counterterrorism Center to law enforcement said that on July 16, 2020, a small, four-rotor off-the-shelf drone was discovered on the top of a building next to a Pennsylvania power substation. Nylon ropes hanging from the drone dangled a two-foot curved piece of copper wire, and analysis of the device indicated that this was likely intended to short circuit the substation in “the first known instance of a modified UAS likely being used in the United States to specifically target energy infrastructure.”</p> <p>Online posts that emphasize how power stations are a vulnerable and enticing target for violent extremists also commonly cite founder of the eco-fascist Pine Tree Party Mike Ma: “Electricity is a ghost, but one you can catch and kill... Do not become the sort of person who gets really good at blowing power stations up while never getting caught,” Ma wrote in his 2019 book <i>Harassment Architecture</i>.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/18 UNDP: prevention violent extremism report
SOURCE	https://www.undp.org/publications/prevention-violent-extremism-2021-annual-report
GIST	Violent extremism requires global solutions. Rise of radicalization and violence is becoming an ever more pressing threat to global stability and peace. UNDP (UN Development Program) advocates for and leads development-based approaches to address violent extremism through its global Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) portfolio. This report presents key achievements, lessons and learnings from UNDP’s global PVE portfolios. UNDP’s PVE team at the Crisis Bureau in New York supports and advances these efforts through thought leadership, research and evidence-based policy development.
Return to Top	<i>Prevention of Violent Extremism: 2021 Annual Report</i> PDF (1MB) DOWNLOAD

HEADLINE	07/17 Al-Shabab deadly resurgence in Somalia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/17/somalia-al-shabab-us-troops/
GIST	<p>MOGADISHU, Somalia — In the predawn hours, the militants of al-Shabab attacked the peacekeepers’ base from every direction with lethal precision.</p> <p>Suicide bombers detonated three cars filled with explosives. Islamist fighters then pounded the facility with heavy gunfire and rocket-propelled grenades, killing several dozen African Union peacekeepers from Burundi. Footage posted on social media showed bodies in military uniforms scattered around the base.</p> <p>“The Burundians were caught unaware,” said Sadaq Mokhtar Abdulle, a Somali Parliament member representing the village of El Baraf, where the base was located. “They were killed in cold blood. And the others fled.”</p> <p>The May 2 assault claimed more than 50 lives, according to local officials and Western security personnel in Somalia, making it the deadliest strike on the U.S.-backed peacekeeping mission here in six years. Its</p>

success underscored the resurgence of al-Shabab and the challenges that African and American troops will face in containing the group.

Two weeks later, President Biden approved the [redeployment](#) of some 450 American troops to Somalia — reversing a [2020 order](#) by the Trump administration to end U.S. counterterrorism operations in the country after more than a decade.

The militants now control roughly 70 percent of south and central Somalia, a country nearly the size of Texas. While the fragile government rules Mogadishu and provincial capitals, al-Shabab and its 5,000 to 7,000 fighters oversee much of the countryside. In other areas, they use fear and mafia-like tactics to extort taxes while providing health, educational and judicial services in an effort to undermine the government and build loyalty.

“We’ve seen an expansion of their territory,” said Samira Gaid, executive director of the Hiraal Institute, a think tank focusing on Somalia and the Horn of Africa. “We are seeing them be more audacious.”

The group’s attacks nearly doubled from 2015 to 2021, according to [data](#) compiled by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies in Washington. Last year, much of the violence involved confrontations with security forces. If the current pace continues through December, attacks will have increased another 71 percent overall in only a year.

This surge coincides with a deadly sweep of violence across Africa by Islamist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Both are seeking to revive their fortunes on the continent after the fall of the latter’s [self-declared caliphate](#) in Iraq and Syria and the weakening of al-Qaeda in Yemen and Afghanistan. Al-Shabab, which in Arabic means “the youth,” accounted for more than a third of all Islamist attacks in Africa in 2021.

“Al-Shabab remains al-Qaeda’s largest, wealthiest and most deadly affiliate, responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocents, including Americans,” Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, head of the Pentagon’s U.S. Africa Command, said in February during a visit to Mogadishu, the Somali capital.

A constellation of factors have converged to bolster the insurgency here. They include Somalia’s myriad [political crises](#), the waning of American support last year, an ineffective African Union force, and the lack of a cohesive counterterrorism strategy among the Somali government and its partners. A [struggling national army](#) remains a work in progress, despite years of training by the United States and other nations.

As U.S. troops return to support Somali and African Union forces, they will face a militancy that is seeking to build up its financial coffers and its international jihadist credentials. Even as it remains a national insurgency, al-Shabab is searching for opportunities to push beyond Somalia’s borders and create a regional caliphate enforcing a strict interpretation of Islamic law.

“Al-Shabab’s lethal insurgency continues with no end in sight,” the International Crisis Group, a Brussels-based think tank, said in [a report](#) last month. “The group consistently stays a step ahead of local and regional military operations. Combined with dysfunction and division among their adversaries, the militants’ agility has allowed them to embed themselves in Somali society. It also makes them hard to defeat.”

What unfolded at the African Union base helps reveal why. This article, which includes previously unreported details about the events at El Baraf, is based on interviews with local officials, a doctor who treated civilian victims’ wounds, Western security personnel with knowledge of the attack, and top officials in the African Union, Somali military, U.S. government and United Nations. The Washington Post also obtained internal text messages detailing the attacks as well as videos and photos that villagers or the militants posted afterward on social media.

On that May morning, al-Shabab fighters seized control and planted their black flag at the base. They also seized artillery and other heavy weaponry, including a ZU 23mm, a Soviet-made anti-aircraft gun, according to the Western security personnel with knowledge of the attack.

In a matter of hours, the group had become stronger, flush with potent weapons to use against the government and its allies.

‘Eyes off the prize’

Little more than a decade ago, al-Shabab was on the defensive — on the verge of being pushed out of Mogadishu, with many of its leaders already dead from U.S. airstrikes.

But the militants adapted and turned to guerrilla warfare. In 2010, the group orchestrated suicide bombings in the Ugandan capital of Kampala, targeting crowds watching the soccer World Cup final and [killing 74](#) people. Three years later, it laid [siege to a mall in Nairobi](#), leaving 67 dead.

Inside Somalia, it continued to stage hundreds of attacks, many aimed at civilians. In 2017, two truck bombs in Mogadishu killed more than 500. In 2020, three American personnel died when al-Shabab [targeted a military base](#) used by U.S. forces in Kenya.

During the past two years, U.N., Western and African Union officials say, the group has taken advantage of political crises surrounding delayed legislative and presidential elections.

“Intense political fighting to a dysfunctional level, at multiple levels of society, caused a lack of governing and attention to security,” said Larry André, the U.S. ambassador to Somalia. “There were still some efforts, but in general they took their eyes off the prize and al-Shabab came back with a vengeance.”

President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw most U.S. forces to a base in Djibouti stymied efforts to tackle the insurgency. It meant troops had to “commute” to Somalia for short-term training missions. [U.S. strikes against the group](#), which had intensified under Trump, slowed dramatically during the first year of the Biden administration, according to data from the U.S. Africa Command.

These days al-Shabab’s “tax base” includes all kinds of businesses, hotels, real estate developments, construction sites and even the port in Mogadishu. At the same time, it has set up schools, clinics and police departments in areas it controls. It also deploys mobile courts, where its judges resolve land and family disputes, further undermining the government’s authority.

“We cohabitate with al-Shabab,” said Isse Mohamed Halane, a top official at the Somali Chamber of Commerce and Industry. “Wherever they are ruling, it’s known we have to abide by their rules. Some people like the way they deal. They prefer them when it comes to the justice system. Other people, they complain.”

Despite the threats of bombings and assassinations, life in the capital appears normal, at least on the surface. Streets and markets are bustling. Lido Beach is crowded daily with people sunbathing or meeting friends in cafes overlooking the ocean.

But the landscape remains dangerous, especially for anyone who speaks out against the militants or appears close to Westerners and other foreigners. Many lawmakers stay or hold meetings inside a fortified enclave by the airport known as the Green Zone.

“The places I can go as a member of Parliament are limited,” said Mohamed Moalimu, a lawmaker who has survived five assassination attempts, including one outside his home in January. He now lives in a heavily secured hotel in front of the airport. “It means that even Mogadishu is not safe.”

Too few connections, weapons, funds

In El Baraf, the Burundian peacekeepers never made real connections with residents. Aside from occasional patrols, local officials said, the soldiers mostly stayed inside the sprawling base surrounded by

sand-filled barriers. They were so isolated that food and supplies were flown in from Mogadishu, about 85 miles to the south. Al-Shabab had planted roadside bombs along routes into the village.

“They were inside the base in defensive positions,” said Abdulle, the village’s representative in Parliament. “They didn’t engage al-Shabab very much.”

Other local officials and lawmakers, as well as U.S.-trained commanders, echo that. They contend that the African Union has no will or appetite to wage operations against the militants — despite having more than 19,000 peacekeepers — and prefers to keep its troops safe on bases.

But Fiona Lortan, a senior African Union official in Mogadishu, defended the mission in an interview last month. The Burundian peacekeepers had no Somali military in El Baraf to help them build close ties to the locals and gain intelligence on al-Shabab, she said. Nor did they have the funds, the weaponry or the numerical strength to actively go after the militants.

Even so, government forces in the area had far less. They totaled about 900 soldiers and 600 mostly unarmed policemen and were responsible for a region with a population of 1.6 million.

“Despite over a decade of training, we still haven’t reached a point where we have sufficient Somali forces to be able to take control,” Lortan said. The mission “can only succeed if the government is a viable partner. ... This has been the missing link.”

The Somali government did not respond to repeated requests for comment about these issues or its army’s preparedness.

With little protection, many residents lived in fear of al-Shabab. That allowed the militants to mobilize their fighters in villages around the base for several days before the attack, Abdulle said.

No residents alerted the peacekeepers.

The militants detonated at least three vehicles simultaneously at different points along the perimeter of the base, recounted Lortan. Then hundreds of militants attacked from every direction. The peacekeepers’ leaders were among those killed, she added, describing the attack as “psychologically very traumatic.”

“There was pandemonium everywhere,” she said. “People were basically running for their lives.”

The Somali army sent no reinforcements, she said. She acknowledged that the militants made off with heavy weaponry but said African Union forces, aided by Pentagon-hired American contractors, destroyed some in helicopter counterstrikes.

“We were terrified they would put on Burundian uniforms and infiltrate bases,” she said.

Six civilians died, Ahmed said, and 13 were wounded in the crossfire. According to a doctor who treated the casualties, their injuries were caused by bullets and bomb shrapnel.

Nine other civilians remain missing and are presumed dead. Officials suspect they were taken away by al-Shabab and executed as collaborators.

Scores of villagers, whom the peacekeepers ostensibly were there to help protect, ran onto the base and looted gasoline, food and other items, as seen in the images on social media. The videos and photos show al-Shabab’s flag fluttering over the base and its fighters using the victory to further recruiting.

A renewed U.S. presence

Inside a nondescript military facility near the airport last month, two dozen Somali soldiers went through an hours-long training session led by the U.S. Special Operations Command. All were part of the Danab, an elite force of 1,600 fighters.

Their instructor discussed how to use information warfare to counter al-Shabab's grip on the population — a key reason it was able to overrun the base. At one point, Jay asked for examples of how the militants influenced villagers.

"They steal the aid and pretend they are the providers of that aid," one Somali commander said.

"They try to gain the trust of the people by telling them they brought the aid," another said.

"If we know this is their tactic, what can we do to counter that?" replied Jay, who asked that he be identified only by his first name because of security protocols.

"We need to plant some military intelligence inside al-Shabab," a third commander suggested.

"Can we just tell the truth about what's happening?" Jay said. "Can we tell the population that we marked the aid in a way that it's difficult to change it, that it's sent by the government?"

Many in the training nodded.

The announcement of the Americans' return coincided with the election in May of a new Somali president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. He had previously governed the country from 2012 to 2017, the period when al-Shabab was on the decline. U.S. and Western officials hope his government can stop the militants' momentum.

The Danab — the name translates in Somali to "lightning" — insists it knows al-Shabab well and will now be able to defeat it. "We are not afraid of al-Shabab," Lt. Col. Ahmed Abdullahi Nuur, the Danab's top commander, said in an interview. "We take the fight to them before they launch their attacks."

With the Americans back in place, "we're expecting more training and more operations," Nuur continued. "We're expecting more airstrikes on al-Shabab. We want to fight shoulder-by-shoulder with the Americans, like we did before."

But with the insurgency stretching into its 15th year, many analysts are convinced that the militants cannot be defeated militarily. The International Crisis Group urged in its report that Somalia's leaders engage in political talks to end the conflict.

The African Union mission is separately winding down. Its funding is running out; a departure date has been set for 2024. Yet Lorton said the government "is not in a position to take over in 2024" if the Somali army remains unprepared and militants continue to dominate much of the country's terrain.

"We don't have control on the ground. You can't fight a war from the air," she said. "This is one of the things that makes al-Shabab so deadly. It makes it very difficult for us and the Somali forces."

"Don't ever underestimate the sophistication of al-Shabab," she added.

Two months after the attack on the base, African Union helicopters are still traveling back and forth to El Baraf to recover the remains of the peacekeepers. Before the militants left, they planted explosives on some corpses.

"Not all have been recovered," Lorton said. "Possibly some may never be recovered. They have been blown up into bits and pieces."

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HEADLINE	07/16 Violent global movement recruiting teens
SOURCE	https://www.politico.com/news/2022/07/16/neo-nazi-white-supremacist-teenagers-00045589

LAS VEGAS, Nevada —When Conor Climo was winning plaudits for his sharp intellect in Arbor View High School's class of 2014, no one imagined he would soon be storing bomb-making material in his bedroom closet in preparation for a race war in the name of Adolf Hitler.

"He knew every element in the periodic table," recalled classmate Lexi Epley.

Climo was a friendly, smart kid but as he grew into a lanky teen with a military-style haircut he became increasingly isolated, angry and — to some classmates — unstable.

"He was exiled a lot," said Ebony Humes, who first became friendly with him in 6th grade. "He would try to make friends, but people most of the time would turn their backs, or act as if he wasn't there. It kind of broke my heart. He did try, consistently, for years. You could see, in his face, the hurt."

"He was a sweet kid," echoed Epley. "But people weren't very nice to him. He was bullied a lot."

By 11th grade, Climo was nearly boiling over with resentment. "No one likes me. I hate it here," he sobbed in the cafeteria, at one point banging on the table, Humes recalled. "I want out."

It was after graduation that Climo, who lived with family at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac, found the community he lacked: a violent global movement hidden in the dark recesses of the internet bent on igniting a neo-Nazi race war, according to public documents, court records, law enforcement officials, and fellow classmates.

For more than a year, reporters from POLITICO, the German newspaper Welt and Insider uncovered the inner workings of this increasingly violent movement, drawn from nearly two dozen chat groups, more than 98,000 text and chat messages — including photos and videos — and interviews with members.

The data offers a rare peek into a burgeoning network of neo-Nazis threatening to kill politicians and journalists, providing instruction on how to build bombs and weapons with 3D printers, and encouraging each other to attack houses of worship, the gay community and people of color. It's what extremism researchers call "militant accelerationism" — a movement to spark a war for white power.

There are dozens of these groups on both sides of the Atlantic with martial names drawn from Nazi propaganda. Many followers have been influenced by the writings of James Mason, the 69-year-old Coloradan who joined an American Nazi party at age 14 and whose books and newsletter are considered modern-day Mein Kampfs for adherents.

Climo was drawn to [The Feuerkrieg Division](#), which translates into "fire war," a moniker inspired by the torchlight marches at Nazi rallies in 1930s Germany.

FKD is [believed to have been established](#) in 2018 in Estonia and was thought [to have quickly petered out](#). But there's been a resurgence in the last few years, according to law enforcement officials and experts in domestic extremist groups.

Involvement with the group led Climo to stockpile bomb-making materials in his bedroom. And as he increasingly embraced the cause of establishing a white ethno-state as his own, [he was arrested](#) after he was suspected of planning — and scouting out targets — to blow up a synagogue and gay bar, according to the FBI and court documents.

Climo pled guilty and was sentenced to two years on one count of possession of an unregistered firearm — specifically, the component parts of a destructive device.

Climo, who court records show was released earlier this year from federal prison and is now on three years' probation, did not respond to multiple requests for an interview. His family members also declined to speak on his behalf or did not respond to interview requests.

His journey from troubled American teen to neo-Nazi warrior was a wake up call and highlights the growing concerns about a new generation of virulent white supremacists emerging in America's suburbs or even in the ranks of the armed forces.

While Internet radicalization has been recognized in recent years as a persistent threat — a handful of American teens have been charged with crimes related to online extremism — the international nature of the radicalization has been [far less appreciated](#).

By some estimates, FKD has just 100 members. But in an era where terrorism and mass violence is increasingly perpetrated by angry lone wolves, the group marks a dangerous evolution in a growing worldwide network of groups plotting in the shadows to enlist followers with military or firearms training to commit attacks on their own or in small groups.

“FKD is particularly alarming right now because it is so decentralized and really only present in online forums,” said Iris Malone, co-founder of the [Mapping Militants Project](#) and a consultant to the Department of Homeland Security. “There is no one point of vulnerability where you can take them down. They will have multiple channels on Telegram or other online services where they can communicate with each and they purposely build in redundant channels.”

In the United States, the FBI and other law enforcement have uncovered numerous ties to the online community in recent years, [including a U.S. Army soldier](#) who was sentenced to two years in prison for spreading information on social media about building a bomb and the chemical agent napalm.

It is a far more decentralized network compared to larger umbrella groups such as Atomwaffen, now known as the National Socialist Order. “Atomwaffen, originally when it was formed, had members in Florida, or it had chapters in Washington,” Malone said. “Having a physical organization or a physical address allows law enforcement authorities to go in and essentially be able to arrest or take down these groups.”

But what may be most troubling about the latest tendrils is its heavy reliance on wayward teens.

“One of the main characteristics of the Feuerkrieg Division is the average age of the members, most of them being minors, starting from the age of 15,” [concluded a 2021 study](#) by the International Observatory on Terrorism Studies in Madrid, Spain.

The analysis also concluded that “the terrorist group Feuerkrieg Division is recruiting again after being disbanded.”

Malone explained that online recruitment makes it especially challenging in the United States, where FKD is not designated a terrorist organization and authorities are faced with the often-competing demands of monitoring potentially dangerous online activities while not running afoul of civil liberties.

“I just don’t think the government has a good handle on the online extremism stuff yet because of free speech issues and social media access,” she said.

‘I mean you no harm’

Arbor View High School, in the Centennial Hills community of Las Vegas, looks like an ordinary suburban American public school campus in a diverse middle-class neighborhood.

Near courtyard tables vandalized with sexually explicit graffiti, the main entrance is framed by a large mural quoting civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: “The time is always right to do what is right.”

But while people of color make up nearly half the student body, the school also has a history of racial tensions.

“There was diversity there but it was still very clear in some situations the separations and the tension between different cultural backgrounds,” recalled Humes, who is Black.

In 2019, two students were arrested and another cited after they targeted Black students with [racist slurs on Instagram](#) and threatened to attack them. One post read, “God just seeing these n—ers [infuriates] me. I just wanna go Columbine...but only kill the f—king n—ers,” referring to the 1999 mass shooting in a Colorado high school.

Climo’s own journey towards militancy broke out into the open in 2016, when he was working as a security guard.

A local news station [featured him patrolling](#) his neighborhood wearing a flak jacket and carrying an AR-15 automatic rifle and four magazines — each containing 30 rounds of ammunition.

“I pretty much stay in constitutional bounds by doing this,” he said, insisting to a family of fleeing neighbors, “I mean you no harm.”

“I remember thinking that’s the last person who should have a gun in his hand,” recalled Humes, who now works for a local nonprofit that helps people with disabilities prepare to enter the job market.

A few months later, [according to court documents](#), Climo was drawn to a question posed on a website called Quora: “What are the downsides of multiculturalism?”

Climo, whose profile pic was a picture of an AR-15 rifle, answered by quoting Hitler. “Your most precious possession on this Earth is your people!”

But over time he exhibited a desire to do something more than just post and provoke. “I am more interested in action than online shit,” he later wrote in an online conversation, according to court records.

By then, according to the FBI, Climo was also using encrypted chat rooms like Discord [that have come under increasing scrutiny](#) for giving a platform to violent incitement where he regularly leveled antisemitic and racial slurs. And it was then he began discussing his violent plans with an FBI informant.

He detailed how to make a “self contained molotov” explosive, according to the FBI. He boasted that he had been training to build an IED, or improvised explosive device. (Some of his fellow students later recalled he had [started bragging](#) about making bombs while still in high school.)

Climo privately shared with the FBI informant online that he was considering setting fire to a Las Vegas synagogue and that he tried unsuccessfully to recruit a homeless person to help him survey the building.

The FBI opened an investigation of Climo for “communicating with individuals who identified with the white supremacist extremist group Atomwaffen Division,” according to the court documents, referring to the umbrella group that the Feuerkrieg Division grew out of.

FBI Special Agent Matthew James Schaeffer, a member of the Las Vegas Joint Terrorism Task Force, described FKD [in an affidavit](#) as consisting mainly of white males between the ages of 16 and 30 “who all believe in the superiority of the white race.”

It pursues a “leadership resistance” strategy that calls for followers, operating independently or in small groups, to challenge the established order and foment attacks on the federal government, minority communities, homosexuals, and Jews, he added.

In online conversations with an undercover agent, Climo also revealed scouting out other potential targets, including the Las Vegas office of the Anti-Defamation League, a prominent anti-hate organization, and a power plant that he referred to as a “soft target,” according to court documents.

By the summer of 2019, the FBI reported in sworn testimony, he revealed he was scouting an area around a bar he said was frequented by homosexuals. He also shared screenshots of what he called a “group of Kike synagogues locations in Vegas.” He proposed attacking one of them with a firearm and an explosive device, describing in detail how he would construct the bomb.

A court-ordered FBI search of his bedroom that August found multiple jars of bomb-making chemicals, wires, circuit boards, and his hand-drawn schematics. There were also a number of unregistered firearms, according to the federal indictment.

Climo recounted his activities for the FBI’s Schaeffer, noting that he first communicated with the Feuerkrieg Division toward the end of 2017.

But upon his arrest, he told the FBI that he believed the group’s goals were a “righteous” cause. “Jews suck,” he said.

New recruits

Climo’s case is seen as a harbinger of what might lie ahead as the FBI, Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement authorities pivot to what they see as one of the biggest domestic terror threats.

“Individuals subscribing to violent ideologies such as violent white supremacy, which are grounded in racial, ethnic, and religious hatred and the dehumanizing of portions of the American community, as well as violent anti-government ideologies, are responsible for a substantial portion of today’s domestic terrorism,” states the White House’s latest [National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism](#).

Increasingly, that also means isolated youngsters who spend lots of time alone and on the Internet.

The Anti-Defamation League [recently reported that the Feuerkrieg Division](#) is expanding its footprint across Europe — including Belgium, England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Latvia, Germany and Russia — as well as North America.

“In online chats, the group has actively sought out new recruits in Texas, the Great Lakes region, California, the Midwest, New Jersey, New York, and Philadelphia,” it found.

One FKD appeal on 8chan, an online message board that bills itself as a home for free speech but [is also known to be a safe haven for far-right extremists](#), reads: “Train and prepare for the collapse and meet up with fellow national socialist comrades.”

The online nature “has important counterterrorism implications because it means that if the government just bans the organization, that’s practically meaningless,” stressed Malone. “It is not a physical organization like Al Qaeda was.”

Also fueling the recruitment efforts, she fears, are recent racially motivated mass shootings, including in El Paso, Texas, and Buffalo, New York, which create “a common set of martyr myths.”

But spotting these domestic terrorists in time may not be as easy as suggested by the case of Climo, whose brazen online communication was detected by law enforcement officials. Climo’s federal public defender, Paul Riddle, [said after his conviction](#) that his client was grateful that he was nabbed before he went down a “very dark path.”

“He’s not on that path anymore, and he’s not the same person that was arrested,” Riddle told the Las Vegas Sun.

But Humes said she ran into her longtime classmate just before he was arrested and asked him how he was doing.

She thought, “Same old Conor, he still loves to talk.”

	It was shocking, Humes said, to learn of the violent and racist turn he had taken. “I saw him as the sweetheart that I remembered from high school and middle school.”
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HEADLINE	07/17 Afghan economy crumbles under Taliban
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/afghan-economy-crumbles-since-taliban-takeover-11658061588?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>KABUL—Until a few months ago, Mohammed Wahid Haykalyar owned a busy restaurant in the heart of Kabul, where people came from all over the city for steaming plates of saffron rice and braised lamb. His monthly earnings of \$3,000 were more than enough to pay for his children’s English-language lessons and after-school soccer practice.</p> <p>These days, he doesn’t even have money to buy food for his family.</p> <p>“I never imagined I would find myself here. I feel ashamed,” said Mr. Haykalyar while he queued at a United Nations food distribution center to collect a sack of rice, beans and a bottle of sunflower oil. “I used to give food to poor people, now I am begging for food myself.”</p> <p>Mr. Haykalyar’s restaurant started losing money right after the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August, when many of his clients left the country and others could no longer afford to eat out. He shut down his business two months later and is now trying to make a living as a casual laborer, earning \$10 on a good day.</p> <p>The government’s ability to manage the economy has largely broken down. The inexperienced Taliban leadership, which overthrew the republic when U.S.-led troops left the country, is isolated and under sanctions, and knows little about running a state.</p> <p>The international financial assistance that had covered the majority of the government’s public spending for years has been cut off. The central bank’s \$9 billion in foreign assets are frozen abroad, blocking its ability to mitigate the crushing inflation that hit 15.5% in April, and day-to-day operations of the banking system for individuals barely function. Even the country’s paper money is disintegrating, since no new afghani notes, which are manufactured abroad, have been sent to Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover. Some are now so damaged money exchangers won’t accept them.</p> <p>The private sector is struggling to do what it can. Yet traders and manufacturers say that, with the banking sector largely paralyzed, importing goods and raw materials has become a huge challenge. Restrictions imposed by Afghan banks on cash withdrawals to avoid a bank run have made it difficult for businesses to pay for goods and services or even pay wages.</p> <p>Afghanistan’s gross domestic product is expected to decline by around 34% by the end of 2022 compared to 2020, the last full year of the republic, according to projections by the World Bank.</p> <p>The U.N. says over 90% of the Afghan population isn’t eating sufficiently and that nearly half of the population is facing acute hunger. Families have resorted to selling their children or their organs to survive. The worst drought in decades has compounded the crisis.</p> <p>“The current humanitarian crisis could kill far more Afghans than the past 20 years of war,” warned the International Rescue Committee, a nongovernmental organization that has been providing assistance in Afghanistan for decades.</p> <p>No profit in months</p> <p>Most entrepreneurs are small tradesmen. Many have had to shut down or pause operations since August. Miya Ibrahim imports flour, cooking oil and rice. He says he hasn’t made a profit in months.</p>

“I’m running at a loss now,” says Mr. Ibrahim, who runs a wholesale store in Kabul. “We’re here just to keep the business going. I pay the rent of the shop, the salary of a worker and of my four sons, who work here, out of my own pocket.”

Mr. Ibrahim’s main problem is that it has become much more expensive to import goods to Afghanistan. “Our biggest challenge is banks. No one can send money abroad,” said Mr. Ibrahim, who now buys goods almost only from bordering Pakistan.

Foreign companies and banks are widely avoiding transactions with Afghanistan for fear of running afoul of international sanctions that target the Taliban leadership. That means people such as Mr. Ibrahim can no longer pay for imports through bank transfers. Like other traders, he has switched since last August from banks to exclusively paying suppliers through hawala networks, a centuries-old system of informal money transfer based on trust.

Hawaladars hold deposits, offer loans and make international payments on behalf of traders. Although hawaladars aren’t licensed to perform these functions, the Afghan central bank has quietly tolerated it. But going through hawaladars, who operate in much of the Muslim world, is more expensive and riskier than sending a bank transfer.

Since the Taliban takeover, “hawalas have worked more than they have at any point in the past 20 years,” said Haji Zirak, a hawaladar and spokesman of Afghanistan’s leading hawala market, Sarai Shahzada in Kabul. “We have kept the economy going.”

The U.S. and some other countries consider hawala transactions illegal because they are unregulated and could potentially be used to launder money.

When international bank transfers broke down, Azizullah Shafiq, who imports medicines from suppliers in California and South Korea, had no choice but to put his business on hold. With no new supplies coming in, he rationed the sale of some drugs at his retail pharmacy.

“If I agree to sell all of our supplies, by tomorrow they will run out,” said Mr. Shafiq, pointing to a box of antibiotics imported from South Korea. He said some drugs for treating cancer and diabetes are among those that can no longer be found in Afghanistan.

Foreign aid, providing food, healthcare and other things, distributed to people through the U.N. and nongovernmental organizations has tried to address some of the needs that the government can’t. The U.S. remains the single-biggest provider of aid with over \$774 million pledged to Afghanistan since the August pullout. The U.N. in March raised \$2.4 billion for Afghanistan from member countries. The World Food Program, a U.N. body, said it is \$1.2 billion short of the money it needs to distribute food to all the 23 million Afghans who need it this year.

Many individuals and nongovernmental organizations have struggled to send funds to help victims of the recent, [devastating earthquake in eastern Afghanistan](#) because of the difficulty in making payments through bank transfers.

Domestic airline

There are some success stories. Prominent Afghan entrepreneur Fahim Hashimy is reviving his domestic airline, East Horizon, whose fleet stopped operating four years ago. The airline plans to relaunch with two 50-seat Bombardier CRJ jets, with plans to buy or lease more if there is demand. Mr. Hashimy said he hopes his planes will be airborne by September, offering domestic and regional flights.

“I don’t want to sound patriotic, but it’s our country. That’s where we were and that’s where we will be,” said Mr. Hashimy, who lives outside Afghanistan but owns a range of businesses inside the country, including a television network. “It’s a business we invested millions of dollars in. And the current government has been more welcoming than the previous government.”

The Taliban government has issued all the permissions needed for East Horizon to resume operations, he said. All that is missing is one of the two planes, which is due to arrive to Afghanistan from the Netherlands, along with its Danish crew.

Major telecom companies, such as the local subsidiary of the United Arab Emirates' Etisalat—one of few, big foreign companies in Afghanistan—never stopped working.

Other companies are functioning in a limited way. Private television stations set up with U.S. assistance during the republic era are still active, although advertising revenues are nearly nonexistent. The financial challenges combine with Taliban restrictions, including a ban on foreign content.

The local Coca-Cola and Pepsi bottling plants are still operating but are seeing lower sales.

When it first took power, the new Taliban government, desperate to bring in foreign investment, went on a PR offensive to show it wanted good relations with the rest of the world, especially emphasizing that women's rights would be respected.

By November, Ali Wardak, an Afghan-American business consultant, was receiving daily calls from foreign companies cautiously asking about investing in Afghanistan. He said he received calls from investors in the U.S., Brazil, China and elsewhere, most asking about mining and oil-and-gas reserves. [Afghanistan has vast mineral riches](#), including precious stones, gold and rare-earth minerals.

"I want to pave the way for foreign companies to be able to come," said Mr. Wardak, 33, who is lobbying the Taliban government to become more business-friendly. "The only way for the country to get back on its feet is to support the private sector."

But sanctions, concerns over rule of law and Taliban policies such as the decision to keep secondary schools for girls shut, meant many foreign companies lost interest.

'Time for cooperation'

Haseeb Habibi, a former Taliban fighter, was freed from prison in August with the Taliban takeover, after spending years in detention by U.S. and allied Afghan forces. Now, he is serving as deputy director of economic cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"We were at war for our national and Islamic values. But now is the time for cooperation. With the same passion that we fought against them, we now welcome them," said Mr. Habibi, who still carries an AK-74 rifle. "I was doing what was right for my country then, and I am doing what is right for my country now." Prior to 2001, Afghanistan was still reeling from the destruction caused by the Soviet invasion two decades earlier and the civil war that followed. Under the first Taliban regime, Afghanistan was considered a pariah state.

With the U.S.-led invasion, Afghanistan shifted to a market economy. Sectors such as construction and logistics prospered, as did the telecommunications and media industries. But the economy remained dependent on military spending and international funding, with aid equal to nearly half the country's GDP.

War and widespread corruption hurt private-sector growth, and Afghanistan remained reliant on imports. Illicit opium cultivation continued to represent a key part of economic activity. In April, the [Taliban formally banned the cultivation of poppy](#).

One area that appears to have improved under the current Taliban government is the need to pay petty bribes in order to do business. Previously, trucks carrying goods across the border would have to pay bribes of hundreds of dollars per truck on each trip to the security forces manning the many checkpoints on roads leading to big cities. There is far less of it now, entrepreneurs said. Although to keep the Taliban on their side, some wealthy businessmen are offering free food and clothes to their foot soldiers instead, according to people close to some of those businessmen.

Under the former republic, corruption was so widespread that the private sector spent \$4 billion in undeclared payments to customs officials a year, according to private estimates shared by a senior representative of the Afghan Federation of Chambers of Commerce. Despite the economic slowdown, the Taliban government has collected customs revenues that are comparable to the fallen republic's, or around \$700 million in the first five months of the year, according to the World Bank.

Price of detergent

But the current inflationary crisis has put basic goods out of the reach of many Afghans. A basket of basic household goods cost 41.6% more in May than a year earlier, according to data from the World Food Program. Food prices continue to rise, partly because of the war in Ukraine and global supply-chain disruptions.

Habibullah Amini owns a detergent manufacturing company in Kabul that supplies cleaning products across Afghanistan. He says the costs of running his business, which has 15 full-time employees, keep rising.

Fuel prices have doubled over the past year. Mr. Amini pays for imported materials in dollars but sells his washing liquids in afghanis, and he loses money whenever the afghani plunges. The retail price of his products keeps changing as a result.

Since the collapse of the republic, Mr. Amini has been paying for imported perfumes and other raw materials through hawaladars. He has to pay them in cash—often \$50,000 at a time.

Just before the Taliban takeover, his company, Qatra, was doing so well that Mr. Amini invested in new equipment to expand production. It has never been used. “Now we only produce as required, as our orders come,” he said.

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HEADLINE	07/16 CPB: 6 border arrests terrorism suspects
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/16/six-terrorism-suspects-nabbed-southern-border-june/
GIST	<p>Homeland Security recorded more than 200,000 illegal border jumpers in June, marking the fourth straight month that the Biden administration has topped that elevated level of border chaos.</p> <p>Among those were six more arrests of terrorism suspects at the southern border, according to data released by Customs and Border Protection late Friday.</p> <p>The total arrests marked a decline compared to May.</p> <p>Of the 207,416 people encountered, 191,898 were nabbed by Border Patrol agents as they sneaked across the border between official crossings. The rest were encountered by CBP officers at the ports of entry.</p> <p>Fewer than half of the border jumpers were ousted under the pandemic health emergency, or Title 42 powers. More than 72,000 were processed and released directly at the border, while most of the rest were released after transfer to another federal agency in the interior.</p> <p>CBP Commissioner Chris Magnus celebrated the lower numbers.</p> <p>“While fluctuations are normal from month to month, we saw a 14 percent decrease in encounters compared to the previous month,” he said in announcing the new data.</p> <p>Digging into the numbers, there were some worrying trends.</p> <p>While the number of migrants traveling as family units — at least one parent and minor child — dropped, the number of illegal immigrant children traveling unaccompanied rose to more than 15,000.</p>

And the Border Patrol reports nabbing 56 people this fiscal year whose names were on the terrorism screening database. As of May that figure stood at 50, meaning six new suspects were caught in June alone.

This is shaping up as the worst year on record by far for terrorism activity on the southern border. In 2021, just 15 terrorism suspects were arrested by the Border Patrol, and before that agents tallied just 11 arrests combined for 2017 through 2020.

CBP has not offered an explanation for the surge.

Analysts say the more people being caught, the more are likely getting by — including terrorism suspects.

Indeed, federal authorities announced charges earlier this year against an alleged ISIS operator they say was orchestrating a plot to assassinate former President George W. Bush.

The man told an informant he planned to smuggle an ISIS hit squad across the southern border, and told the informant he's already smuggled two Hezbollah figures into the county, charging them \$50,000 apiece.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	07/17 Study: US adults out of shape
SOURCE	https://www.studyfinds.org/americans-out-of-shape-cant-touch-toes/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK — More than seven in 10 (73%) Americans are eager to increase their physical activity to keep up with their children. That's because the pandemic kept many individuals from taking care of their bodies as well as they were prior to COVID-19.</p> <p>A recent study polled 2,000 U.S. adults to see how they're staying active as their routines and lifestyles have undergone drastic change over the past two years. Only half of respondents (51%) can touch their toes without straining. However, people are looking to change their habits, with 70 percent making more of an effort to move around and be physically active more now than at the start of the pandemic.</p> <p>Whether it's due to working from home or lack of motivation, 42 percent say they struggle to stay physically active during the day.</p> <p>Get up and get moving</p> <p>Conducted by OnePoll on behalf of Voltaren Arthritis Pain Gel, the survey reveals that now more than ever, Americans are planning on making an effort to be physically active. In fact, people are renewing their commitment to an active lifestyle through activities like stretching at home (43%), at-home workouts (38%), and taking mental health walks (31%).</p> <p>It's clear that movement is a means to help people feel better about themselves and connect with those around them. Eighty-one percent of the survey say exercising puts them in a better mood, and 54 percent have made it a goal to exercise more with their family. Other motives to increase movement are to improve their physical health (67%) and mental health (51%), as well as to be a good influence on their children's lives (42%).</p> <p>However, when given a list of common hurdles, 87 percent say one or more of those obstacles prevents them from being physically active during the day. The average person reports getting only 3,800 steps per day, instead of the 10,000 recommended by the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity. Lack of motivation (39%) and injuries (30%) are among the hurdles at the top of the list. However, the biggest obstacle is joint pain and arthritis (42%).</p>

“Our results show that pain is the prevailing barrier that affects people who are trying to increase their movement,” says Rishi Mulgund, Brand Director, Pain Relief at GSK Consumer Healthcare, in a statement. “Those with osteoarthritis (OA) have an especially challenging time, as OA negatively affects them an average of four days a week. Fifty-nine percent also said their OA makes moving and exercising more difficult.”

Healthy hacks around the house

While those with osteoarthritis may initially feel hesitant to move more, low-impact activities that are gentle on the joints can help relieve arthritis pain over time. That’s why many individuals with OA [incorporate general exercise](#) (42%) and stretching the affected area (44%) into their routine.

“Forty-four percent of those with osteoarthritis said having a support system of people who understand what they’re going through has helped them manage their pain,” Mulgund continues. “Over-the-counter topical treatments can provide additional support and improve mobility.”

On a broader level, many people are also trying a number of tricks or “shortcuts” to sneak in movement throughout the day, such as walking around the house when on the phone (54%) and doing exercises such as [crunches and squats while watching TV](#) (42%).

Actively engaging in movement and activities that bring joy, such as gardening, swimming, dancing, talking walks, bike riding, or doing yoga, Pilates or Tai Chi are on the rise. These aren’t the only ways people are moving. In fact, many are thinking outside of the box to get in more steps and incorporate physical movement into their daily routines.

“There are tons of ways you can get creative to get up and move,” Mulgund says. “Movement is more than just a way to get physical activity in — it’s time spent with family.”

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HEADLINE	07/16 Cat in tree? Rescues across western WA
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/kitty-up-a-tree-come-along-as-canopy-cat-rescue-rescues-them-across-western-wa/
GIST	<p>PORT ORCHARD — On a recent Tuesday morning, Iris, a cat, was letting everyone in the neighborhood know about her unhappy predicament.</p> <p>The 4-year-old tortie had stranded herself up a fir tree overnight in the parking lot of a single-story apartment complex. “Meow-rr!” she announced mournfully at regular intervals. “Meow-rr-rr!”</p> <p>Her owner, Terry Quesnell, said he’d tried to coax her to the ground, standing in the back of a truck with a blanket. No dice. Now Iris was hungry and wanted to leave the tree, but, like most cats, she’s better at climbing up than down.</p> <p>Quesnell had called the local fire department, but was told they don’t deal with cats in trees anymore. So, he turned to Canopy Cat Rescue, a nonprofit that retrieves treed kitties across Western Washington.</p> <p>Tom Otto and Shaun Sears, a pair of certified arborists, founded the outfit in 2009, transitioning from tree caretakers to cat saviors. Operating solely on donations, they rescue hundreds of cats a year, from Vancouver, Washington, to the Canadian border.</p> <p>On this day in Port Orchard, Otto showed up to assess the Iris situation.</p> <p>This would not be a particularly difficult mission. Iris was only about 20 feet up. Their average cat rescue is 60 feet or higher in a tree, and has been up there three days.</p> <p>Neighbors gathered around with opinions.</p>

“That cat is not very smart, I’ll tell you that!” a man called out. Otto jumped to Iris’ defense: “She got away from whatever was chasing her, you know.”

Cinching himself up the fir with a harness, rope and animal-handler net, Otto talked to Iris, calming her as he approached the limb on which she was perched, still crying for assistance.

Reaching Iris’ branch, Otto pulled her close and plopped her in the net and the crying stopped. Lowering himself down, he handed the net to Quesnell, directing him to let Iris out only when back inside his nearby apartment.

Iris joined a long roster of cats returned to solid ground and grateful owners. In recent months, Canopy Cat Rescue has retrieved Sancho, Dilly, Belly, Kitten George and Lil Bear. They’ve also been there for Pebbles, Pepper, Citrus, Indica, Mischief, Vindaloo, Tinkerbelle, Stinkyface, plenty of Lunas and Tigers, and, the other week, Brian.

They document many of their jobs on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#). In 2015, the duo starred in their own reality show, “[Treetop Cat Rescue](#),” on Animal Planet. It lasted 10 episodes. Back then, Otto and Sears were rescuing 250 cats a year. Now they’re up to about 750.

The calls for help get split by location. Otto, 49, who lives in Olympia, generally takes everything from about Auburn south, while Sears, 43, from Woodinville, handles the Seattle area and anything north.

It’s largely a labor of love. They don’t charge any fee, but accept donations to help pay themselves a modest amount and defray expenses, especially gas. Some people have offered a dozen eggs or cookies. Others drop \$100 or even \$500.

“It’s somewhat of a calling for us. It feels great to help people,” said Otto, who owns two rescued cats, Bean and Bug, in addition to Miko, a border collie.

“We don’t like cats. We love cats,” said Sears, who owns a big fluffy orange cat named Medi, or “King Cat,” plus a 16-year-old black lab, Tommy, and a 3-year-old miniature Australian Shepherd.

The distress calls come in almost daily, and are triaged by the amount of time a cat has been in a tree and its temperament. Sears says with feral or skittish cats, they’ll sometimes advise people to give it a couple of days, as some cats do come down on their own.

The difficulty of their jobs can vary wildly. Sears said some cats will be stranded at the very tippy top of a conifer, like a star on a Christmas tree. Their highest rescue was 170 feet up, according to Sears.

A few years back, a cat named Slint evaded rescue by jumping between three or four trees in a stand of Douglas firs as Otto tried to reach him. Otto eventually got wise and sawed off branches the cat was using as bridges. “When I got to him he was like [purrs] ‘Hey, Buddy!’ ”

The day after the relatively easy Iris rescue, Sears faced a far more difficult extrication.

Ludo, a fluffy white Persian cat, was meowing from way up — probably 65 or 70 feet — in a maple tree in Seattle’s Dearborn Park, barely visible from the forested floor. The slightly swaying branches looked fine to support Ludo’s weight. But a human?

“This one’s an issue, just where he is in the tree. It’s not super thick up there,” Sears said, sizing up the maple before strapping on his climbing gear, including ropes, carabiners and spiked shoes. Sears says he and Otto like to assign each rescue a difficulty rating. If Iris was a 1 or 2, Ludo looked like an 8 or a 9.

Ludo was a repeat customer. This was his fifth time getting rescued by Canopy Cat Rescue and the third time in this park.

“It’s not a lesson a cat learns,” Sears said nonjudgmentally. On the bright side, Ludo was not likely to try to flee him. “He kind of knows the drill.”

Cats generally climb high up trees to escape a perceived threat, Sears said. Sometimes it’s people startling them. Sometimes other cats. Sometimes it’s dogs or coyotes.

“Hey, Ludo. Hey, buddy. Be right there!” Sears called out.

Jonathan Smith, Ludo’s owner, said he has tried to halt the escapes and installed a “catio” so Ludo can enjoy the outdoor air in an enclosed space. But Ludo darted out the door again a day ago when he and his wife were leaving the house. After that, he wound up in the tree.

“He just gets scared and goes up there and doesn’t come back down,” Smith said, noting he’s heard coyotes howling in the area.

Sears made a plan to scale the maple and rope it together with nearby trees to create more stability. Once he started climbing, the rescue went fairly quickly. Ludo helpfully did not try to get away and even clambered down a little lower.

Once Ludo was safely netted, Sears descended quickly on a rope, dangling in midair and handing the cat off to Smith. “Not as hard as I projected. I’d probably give that one a 6,” he said.

Before leaving the park, Sears pointed to some decomposing poop, identifying it as coyote scat. It appeared like the coyote had dined on something furry, so Sears scanned the scat with a microchip reader.

He noted a [2020 study](#) by the National Park Service and California State University, Northridge which found domestic cat remains in 20% of urban coyotes’ scat.

Fortunately, Sears’ scan found no microchip.

Smith was grateful for Ludo’s latest rescue. “A lifesaver for me and my family,” he said. “Emotional wife, emotional daughter. They’re very attached to Ludo, so just knowing he’s up in the tree overnight is stressful. I can’t get up there.”

Hopefully, he said, this would be Ludo’s final tree adventure, though the cat, asked for comment, was making no promises.

If Ludo gets stranded again, Sears will be back — no problem.

“He could call us 10, 15, 20 times and we’re not going to say no. The cat is going to end up suffering in the tree or he’s going to call somebody else who may not be as good at it,” he said.

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HEADLINE	07/16 Dangerous chemicals in ship containers
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/the-dangerous-chemicals-lurking-inside-shipping-containers/
GIST	<p>They had no idea the shipping container was full of toxic gas. But mere moments after opening it, the two workers began to feel the effects. One man fell unconscious, convulsing with epileptic seizures. The other felt an irritation in his throat and began salivating uncontrollably.</p> <p>The cargo papers for the container stated that it contained glassware and ceramics. The workers had no reason to suspect they were in danger. But they were. And so was the ambulance crew that came to their aid. Arriving on the scene, they saw the man having seizure after seizure, so they quickly anesthetized and intubated both workers. In the ambulance on the way to the hospital, the medics also began to feel ill: sore throats, irritated eyes, and hypersalivation.</p>

This frightening and little-known incident occurred in 2006 at the port in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Thankfully, [all involved survived their initial exposure](#), though it was undoubtedly a close call. The toxic gas that had assailed them was the odorless and colorless methyl bromide. Acute doses of methyl bromide can be fatal; chronic and acute exposure [increases the risk of prostate cancer](#).

In the years since that distressing day, researchers have investigated the many poisonous chemicals sometimes lurking inside sealed shipping containers.

Ruth Hinz, a doctoral candidate at Massey University in New Zealand, led [a recent study cataloging the harmful airborne chemicals](#) in a sample of containers shipped to New Zealand. Hinz's work is [in line with similar recent research conducted in Sweden](#), which suggests that around one in eight containers arriving in that country harbors significant levels of dangerous airborne chemicals. When workers crack a container open, they may have little way of knowing what awaits them.

"It can be such a cocktail of chemicals in the container," says Hinz. "You don't know in advance which ones will be in there."

Some toxic chemicals are pumped into cargo containers on purpose as fumigants. Methyl bromide is one example, though its use is now banned in many countries. But the additional challenge for dockworkers is that the presence of other dangerous gases could be entirely unintentional and unexpected. As in Rotterdam, a lack of cautionary labeling could also mask the danger.

Before sending containers on their way, workers at the port of departure sometimes fumigate cargo boxes with pesticides, especially if the container is loaded with food, animal feed, or timber. These chemicals, such as methyl bromide, ethylene oxide, and phosphine, can cause myriad symptoms, ranging from nausea and skin irritation to seizures and even death.

Some cargo may off-gas harmful chemicals. For instance, product packaging could contain toluene, while plastics might emit benzene. The latter can damage bone marrow and cause anemia.

And there could be substances from previous cargo left inside, lining the interior of the container, too. Dockworkers might not realize such toxicants are awaiting them in a newly arrived container.

For their study, Hinz and her colleagues enlisted the help of the New Zealand customs authority. Staff used probes, which they pushed through the rubber seals of the container doors, to collect gas samples from 490 sealed containers. Hinz also gathered air samples from dozens of other containers herself, tracking how the concentrations of compounds changed in real time as the containers were opened and the air inside allowed to mix with fresh outside air.

The investigation revealed plenty of nasty substances. The customs authority staff found methyl bromide, the compound that overwhelmed the Rotterdam dockworkers, in 3.5 percent of the sealed containers. They found formaldehyde in 81 percent of the containers, and ethylene oxide in 4.7 percent, to name a few of the chemicals. Exposure to ethylene oxide can cause various unpleasant symptoms, including nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Formaldehyde, a preservative, is carcinogenic and can also cause internal irritation when inhaled, among other symptoms.

In their study, Hinz and her colleagues found that some of the measured concentrations appeared high enough to cause an acute reaction that triggers immediate symptoms. However, Hinz says that, in practice, it's unusual for a worker to come into direct contact with toxic gases at such elevated levels. Instead, there is a more common but still notable risk from repeat exposure to low concentrations. Chronic contact with these chemicals can potentially increase the risk of cancer or cause psychiatric problems, for example. And yet, relatively little research exists on the risks of the chemicals inside cargo containers.

"I definitely think it needs attention, far more attention than it's got," says Hinz.

	<p>Gunnar Johanson, a toxicologist at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden who acted as a peer reviewer for Hinz’s study, agrees with her assessment.</p> <p>“We don’t know exactly how big the risk is, but it’s an unnecessary risk, because you can easily address it,” he says. All it takes is better ventilation.</p> <p>A few years ago, Johanson and his colleagues were called to examine a suspect container in Sweden. It was loaded with rice, but inside the container was also a strange blue bag filled with white powder. When Johanson analyzed the air, he found phosphine, a fumigant, at a concentration high enough to be fatal.</p> <p>To protect dockworkers, Johanson and his colleagues have designed a device that connects to an extraction fan and attaches to the existing—but tiny—ventilation holes on the sides of most containers. Experiments suggest that once the device is switched on, the concentration of harmful gases falls within minutes.</p> <p>“We can reduce roughly 90 percent of the volatile contaminants in one hour,” says Johanson. The contraption is currently used by the Swedish customs authority, he adds.</p> <p>There should be higher awareness in the shipping and logistics industries of the dangers associated with exposure to harmful gases in shipping containers, says Martin Cobbald, managing director of Dealey Environmental, an environmental services firm in the United Kingdom.</p> <p>His firm is frequently contracted to open and ventilate containers, but, he adds, “We don’t do it nearly as much and for the range of people that we should do.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/16 Nature healed in pandemic ‘anthropause’?
SOURCE	https://dnyuz.com/2022/07/16/did-nature-heal-during-the-pandemic-anthropause/
GIST	<p>In a typical spring, breeding seabirds — and human seabird-watchers — flock to Stora Karlsö, an island off the coast of Sweden.</p> <p>But in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic canceled the tourist season, reducing human presence on the island by more than 90 percent. With people out of the picture, white-tailed eagles moved in, becoming much more abundant than usual, researchers found.</p> <p>That might seem like a tidy parable about how nature recovers when people disappear from the landscape — if not for the fact that ecosystems are complex. The newly numerous eagles repeatedly soared past the cliffs where a protected population of common murre laid its eggs, flushing the smaller birds from their ledges.</p> <p>In the commotion, some eggs tumbled from the cliffs; others were snatched by predators while the murre were away. The murre’s breeding performance dropped 26 percent, Jonas Hentati-Sundberg, a marine ecologist at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, found. “They were flying out in panic, and they lost their eggs,” he said.</p> <p>The pandemic was, and remains, a global human tragedy. But for ecologists, it has also been an unparalleled opportunity to learn more about how people affect the natural world by documenting what happened when we abruptly stepped back from it.</p> <p>A growing body of literature paints a complex portrait of the slowdown of human activity that has become known as the “anthropause.” Some species clearly benefited from our absence, consistent with early media narratives that nature, without people bumbling about, was finally healing. But other species struggled without human protection or resources.</p>

“Human beings are playing this dual role,” said Amanda Bates, an ocean conservation scientist at the University of Victoria in Canada. We are, she said, acting as “threats to wildlife but also being custodians for our environment.”

The research has actionable lessons for conservation, scientists say, suggesting that even modest changes in human behavior can have outsized benefits for other species. Those shifts could be especially important to consider as the human world roars back to life and summer travel surges, [potentially generating an “anthropulse”](#) of intense activity.

“A lot of people will feel like they want to catch up on holiday travel, work travel, catch up on life,” said Christian Rutz, a behavioral ecologist at the University of St Andrews who introduced the concept of an “anthropulse” in a recent paper. (He and Dr. Bates were also part of the team that coined “anthropause.”)

“Humans will and should travel and should enjoy nature,” he added. “But I think it can be quite subtle tweaks to how we do things that can still have a huge impact.”

The good

When the pandemic hit, many human routines came to a sudden halt. On April 5, 2020 — the peak of the pandemic lockdowns — 4.4 billion people, or 57 percent of the planet, were under some sort of movement restriction, [scientists estimated](#). Driving decreased by more than 40 percent, while air traffic declined by 75 percent.

These sudden shifts allowed researchers to tease apart the effects of human travel from the many other ways we shape the lives of other species.

“We know that humans impact ecosystems by changing the climate, we know that they have dramatic impacts by changing land use, like razing down habitat and building shopping malls,” said Christopher Wilmers, a wildlife ecologist at the University of California, Santa Cruz. “But this sort of strips all that away, and says, ‘Oh, well, what are the impacts of human mobility itself?’”

With humans holed up in their homes — cars stuck in garages, airplanes in hangars, ships in docks — [air](#) and [water quality](#) improved in some places, scientists found. Noise pollution abated [on land](#) and [under the sea](#). Human-disturbed habitats [began to recover](#).

In March 2020, Hawaii’s Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve, a popular snorkeling destination, closed and remained shuttered for nearly nine months. “The pandemic reset the visitor impacts to zero,” said Ku’ulei Rodgers, a coral reef ecologist at the Hawai’i Institute of Marine Biology.

Without swimmers kicking up sediment, water clarity [improved by 56 percent](#), Dr. Rodgers and her colleagues found. Fish density, biomass and diversity increased in waters that had previously been thick with snorkelers.

Indeed, scientists found that many species had moved into new habitats as pandemic lockdowns changed what ecologists have sometimes called “the landscape of fear.”

“All animals are, you know, trying not to die,” said Kaitlyn Gaynor, an ecologist at the University of British Columbia. That drive to survive prompts them to keep their distance from potential predators, including humans. “We are noisy and novel and resemble their predators — and in many cases are their predators,” Dr. Gaynor said.

For instance, the mountain lions that live in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California typically stay away from cities. But after local shelter-in-place orders took effect in 2020, the animals [became more likely to select habitats](#) near the urban edge, Dr. Wilmers and his colleagues found.

Dr. Wilmers speculated that the mountain lions were responding to changes in the urban soundscape, which might typically be filled with human chatter and the rumble of passing cars. “But as soon as those

audio stimuli are gone, then the animals are, like, ‘Well, might as well go see if there’s anything to eat here,’” he said.

Just north, in a newly hushed San Francisco, white-crowned sparrows [began singing more quietly](#), yet the distance across which they could communicate “more than doubled,” researchers found.

The birds also began singing at lower frequencies, a shift that is associated with better performance — and an improved ability to defend territory and woo mates. “Their songs were much more ‘sexy,’” said Elizabeth Derryberry, a behavioral ecologist at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and an author of the study.

“And it was overnight,” she added. “Which kind of gives you hope that if you reduce noise levels in an area, you can have immediate positive impact.”

The bad

But the effects of human absence were nuanced, varying by species, location and time.

Multiple studies found that [as traffic eased](#) in the spring of 2020, [the number of wild animals](#) that were [struck and killed by cars](#) declined. But the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions soon [crept back up](#), even as traffic remained below normal levels, one team of researchers reported.

“Per mile driven, there were more accidents happening during the pandemic, which we interpreted as changes in animal space use,” said Joel Abraham, a graduate student studying ecology at Princeton University and an author of the study. “Animals started using roads. And it was difficult for them to stop, even when traffic started to rebound.”

The lockdowns seemed to embolden some invasive species, [increasing the daytime activity](#) of Eastern cottontail rabbits in Italy, where their rapid expansion may threaten native hares, while disrupting efforts to control others. For instance, the pandemic [delayed a long-planned project](#) to cull giant, predatory mice from Gough Island, a critical habitat for threatened sea birds in the South Atlantic Ocean.

The mice, which likely arrived with 19th-century sailors, attack and feed on live bird chicks, often leaving large open wounds. “I nicknamed them ‘vampire mice,’” said Stephanie Martin, the environmental and conservation policy officer for Tristan da Cunha, the archipelago of which Gough Island is a part. Many chicks succumb to their injuries.

Scientists were set to begin an ambitious mouse-eradication effort when the pandemic hit, delaying the project for a year. In the intervening breeding season, with the vampire mice still running rampant, not one [MacGillivray’s prion chick](#) — an endangered bird that breeds almost exclusively on Gough — survived. “We lost a whole other breeding season,” Ms. Martin said. “It meant yet another year with no fledglings.”

It is another illustration of humanity’s dual roles: The mice are only on Gough because humans took them there. “But now we absolutely need humans to cull them,” Dr. Bates said.

These kinds of impacts added up all over the world, she said, as local [conservation](#), [education](#) and [monitoring](#) programs were disrupted or [deprived of funding](#). Spikes in [wildlife poaching](#) and [persecution](#), as well as [illegal logging and mining](#), were reported in multiple countries.

Economic insecurity might have driven some of this activity, but experts believe that it was also made possible by lapses in human protection, including reduced staffing in parks and preserves and even [an absence of tourists](#), whose presence might typically discourage illegal activity.

“We’re not entirely the bad guys,” said Mitra Nikoo, a research assistant at the University of Victoria. “We’re actually doing a lot more good than we’ve been giving ourselves credit for.”

The lessons

As people resume their normal routines, researchers will continue monitoring wildlife and ecosystems. If an ecosystem that appeared to benefit from humanity's disappearance suffers when people come flooding back, that will provide stronger evidence of our impact.

"It's this reversal of the experimental or semi-experimental intervention that scientifically allows really robust insights into how environmental processes work," Dr. Rutz said.

Understanding these mechanisms can help experts design programs and policies that channel our influence more thoughtfully.

"If we then strengthen the role as custodians and then continue to regulate pressures, then we can really tilt the role of humans in the environment to an overwhelmingly positive role," said Carlos Duarte, a marine ecologist at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia.

For example, one team of researchers found that with vacationers not traveling to the Greek island of Zakynthos in the summer of 2020, the loggerhead sea turtles that nest there [spent more time close to shore](#) in the warmer waters that are optimal for female egg development than they had in previous years.

The results suggest that tourists are driving sea turtles into cooler waters, slowing egg development and potentially reducing the number of clutches, or batches of eggs, the animals lay during the short nesting season, said Gail Schofield, a conservation ecologist at Queen Mary University of London and an author of the study.

"It's a very narrow window of opportunity," she said.

Halting all tourism is not possible, she acknowledged. But designating a stretch of the shoreline as a protected turtle habitat and prohibiting swimming there in the early summer could provide an important refuge for the animals, she said.

When the Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve reopened in December 2020, it instituted a strict new cap on daily visitors. It is now closed two days a week, up from one before the pandemic, Dr. Rodgers said. Other changes could pay dividends, too, experts said: Building [wildlife crossings over highways](#) could keep some animals from becoming road kill, while mandating quieter car engines and boat propellers could curb noise pollution on land and at sea.

"No one can say anymore that we can't change the whole world in a year, because we can," Dr. Bates said. "We did."

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HEADLINE	07/16 Weekly: 1M UK chickens dying needlessly
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/16/a-million-uk-chickens-die-needlessly-each-week-to-keep-prices-low
GIST	<p>More than a million meat chickens are dying every week in the UK before reaching slaughter weight, according to a new report.</p> <p>An analysis of government figures by the animal welfare charity Open Cages reveals about 64 million chickens die prematurely each year in the UK. The dead birds can be incinerated or rendered into usable materials such as protein meal.</p> <p>Chris Packham, the broadcaster and conservationist, said: "I think consumers would be utterly disgusted to know that a million of these intelligent, sensitive birds are dying every week to get cheap chicken on to their plates.</p>

“The utter misery these animals face on a daily basis is unnecessary and would outrage even the most ardent meat-eaters because it serves no purpose but to satisfy the profits of our major supermarkets, who refuse to help them.”

Animal welfare campaigners say the mortality rates could be significantly reduced by better welfare standards. They are urging retailers to support the Better Chicken Commitment, an initiative to phase out fast-growing breeds and reduce stocking density.

Welfare experts say the modern chicken is [genetically bred to grow so quickly that it can put a strain on its body](#), increasing the risk of cardiac arrest.

Research has shown that fast-growing chickens which reach their kill weight in just 35 days can have higher mortality, lameness and muscle disease than slower growing breeds. One of the most common causes of death in flocks is heart failure, or sudden death syndrome.

Connor Jackson, chief executive of Open Cages, which has produced the new report, said: “The supermarkets sell food with advertisements of animals in green fields but never show broiler chickens in sheds. It’s appalling that the supermarkets continue to sell these fast-growing breeds.”

While all the major retailers in France have signed the Better [Chicken](#) Commitment, it is not yet supported by the biggest supermarkets in Britain. Its backers to date include Marks & Spencer, Waitrose, Pret, KFC and the food service company the Compass Group. Sainsbury’s announced in April that its fresh chicken would be bred with 20% more space than the UK standard by March 2023.

The British Poultry Council, the trade group for the industry, said: “Our birds are the most valuable part of production so we are working incredibly hard to minimise the level of mortality in the process, which is averaging at around 4%.

“We use a variety of production systems, including Better Chicken Commitment, according to the demand of consumers. It has a higher environmental impact and cost of production, so it currently makes up only 1% one percent of the market. We are an industry driven by consumer preference.”

Andrew Opie, director of food and sustainability at the British Retail Consortium, said: “Our members take their responsibilities to animal welfare very seriously, and they ensure it is a key part of the production standards for all the meat they sell.

“Retailers already give consumers the choice of how their chicken is reared, including free-range and organic chicken, in addition to the standard range.”

A Defra spokesperson said: “All farm animals are protected by comprehensive and robust animal health and welfare legislation. We welcome the fact that many businesses have already signed up to the Better Chicken Commitment and encourage others to do so. We are exploring how government can better support this best practice.”

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	07/17 Houston: argument then 4 shooting deaths
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/07/17/four-people-dead-shooting-houston/8421658086557/
GIST	July 17 (UPI) -- Four people have died after an argument led to a shooting at an apartment complex in Houston, law enforcement officials said Sunday.

	<p>Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said in a statement to Twitter that deputies responded to a building at the Cyprus Ridge complex on Bammelwood Drive around 11:20 p.m. and found four people with gunshot wounds.</p> <p>Three of the people were declared dead at the scene and the fourth was transported to a local hospital in critical condition and later died of his injuries.</p> <p>"Deputies spoke with several witnesses who reported seeing several males, including the victims, shooting at each other after an argument," the sheriff's office said in a news release.</p> <p>However, the sheriff's office said that no motive or suspect information has been determined and that investigators are seeking people with information to come forward.</p> <p>The identities of the victims have not been released but Gonzalez said that all were Hispanic males, two of whom were 16 years old. The other two victims were 19 and 25.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Churches, synagogues increase security
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/security-houses-of-worship/2022/07/17/id/1079138/
GIST	<p>The Rev. Steven Marsh never thought he would see the day his church in Laguna Woods, California — a town of 16,500 populated largely by retirees — would be spending \$20,000 a month for security.</p> <p>Then a gunman opened fire on May 15 during a luncheon at Geneva Presbyterian Church, where Marsh is senior pastor, killing one and injuring five other members of a Taiwanese congregation that met there. Officials said the man, who was motivated by political hatred against Taiwan, chained the church's doors shut and hid firebombs inside before shooting at the gathering of elderly church members.</p> <p>Houses of worship are meant to be places of shelter, reflection and peace, where strangers are welcome. But the recent string of high-profile mass shootings in the U.S. is a reminder violence can happen anywhere, prompting some faith leaders to ramp up security.</p> <p>At Geneva Presbyterian, armed security guards now stand watch every weekday and during Sunday services. The church also is adding more security cameras, developing an active shooter plan and applying for Department of Homeland Security funding.</p> <p>"We're not trying to militarize the church," Marsh said. "We prayed about it and made a decision to have armed security as an act of faith."</p> <p>Without the new security measures, Marsh predicted that a mass exodus by the congregation and the schools on the church's campus would have followed the shooting.</p> <p>Creating a space that is both safe and welcoming is possible, said Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker, the former spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, Texas.</p> <p>In January, he and three others were taken hostage by a pistol-wielding man during a Shabbat service. Cytron-Walker threw a chair at the gunman — a courageous act that helped them safely escape — after a nearly 11-hour standoff. He credits the several rounds of active shooter training he has taken.</p> <p>"When you are unable to run away or find a hiding place, you need to find a way to act and to fight back," Cytron-Walker said. "When we were most afraid he was going to kill us, I saw a moment I had been looking for all day long."</p> <p>Cytron-Walker now leads Temple Emanuel in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. As he works on a security plan with his new congregation, he is being mindful of how a welcoming synagogue can enhance safety "because someone who wants to do harm can see that they are not going to be able to walk in anonymous."</p>

Historically, sanctuaries have been vulnerable to violent attacks — from bombings at Black churches during the Civil Rights era to more recent shootings in the U.S. at mosques and Sikh gurdwaras. In the U.S., FBI hate crime statistics show that incidents in churches, synagogues, temples and mosques increased 34.8% between 2014 and 2018.

“All faiths are under attack in America by radicals and extremists,” said Alon Stivi, a security consultant for synagogues, Jewish community centers and day schools. Some congregants are reticent to show up.

“They’re asking a lot more questions: ‘Should I come to the weekly services or just come for the holidays? And if I come, should I bring my kids?’”

Religious leaders who once preferred to leave security in the hands of the divine are taking precautions that seemed unthinkable years prior, Stivi said. More congregants are carrying concealed handguns to services, too, he said.

From \$25 million in 2016 to \$180 million last year, the federal government has steadily increased the amount of funding it sets aside to help the faith community with security costs, Stivi said. But not all faith leaders are aware they can apply for it, he said.

Past attacks on houses of worship and other public spaces have prompted faith leaders to evaluate — sometimes for the first time — if there is more that can be done to keep their flocks safe.

Today an armed police officer watches over Sunday services at Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, said the Rev. Kylon Middleton, who leads the congregation. When an officer is unable to be on campus for church events, members carrying concealed weapons keep watch.

“It is sad, but we are in such times where we must have armed security to protect our people,” he said.

The church is two blocks away from Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 2015, a self-proclaimed white supremacist opened fire during Bible study and killed nine worshippers, including the senior pastor. Middleton said the late pastor was like a brother to him.

In the wake of the massacre, security discussions at Mt. Zion factor worship style into the equation, including the need for some to always keep their eyes open, especially when most have theirs closed in prayer, Middleton said.

“No one ever thought mass shootings would happen in churches, which are sacred sanctuaries where you can escape the world and seek spiritual refuge,” he said. “When that space has been violated, it creates a restlessness of spirit.”

After the 2018 massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Rabbi Jon Leener met with local New York police to discuss safety for Base BKLYN, his home-based ministry that has welcomed thousands.

For years, he and his wife, Faith, would unlock their front door right before Shabbat dinners, believing in a Judaism where no door is shut or locked. That changed after Tree of Life — the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. history. Leener also installed a security camera and a buzz-in system for visitors. He hired an armed guard after this year’s hostage situation in Texas.

“It’s terribly unfortunate that we live in an age when we need to compromise our value of openness for the threat of violence, but that is just the reality at the moment,” Leener said.

It is a balancing act for many. Marsh said the shooting in his church happened because members of the Taiwanese congregation were welcoming to the shooter — a person they didn’t know.

“The church needs to be welcoming to all people, and we cannot lose that,” he said.

	“Are there ways an active shooter could get on our campus again? Yes. But we have to be willing to have this happen again. Otherwise, we would all have to go through metal detectors. It would no longer be a church.”
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HEADLINE	07/17 'Systemic failures' police response Uvalde
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/17/us/uvalde-shooting-report.html
GIST	<p>HOUSTON — The first comprehensive assessment of the law enforcement response to the deadly school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, found that blame for the failure to swiftly confront the gunman rested not only with the school police chief, but also with the scores of state and federal officers who gathered at the deadly scene but did not act.</p> <p>The 77-page report, released Sunday by a special Texas House committee, represented a broad indictment of police inaction at Robb Elementary School, citing “systemic failures” that left the school inadequately secured and the police officers who responded mired in confusion and bad information.</p> <p>Nearly 400 officers responded to the school that day. Yet the decision to finally confront the gunman was made by a small group of officers, including specially trained Border Patrol agents and a deputy sheriff from a neighboring county, the report found, concluding that others at the scene could have taken charge and done so far earlier.</p> <p>The findings represented the most complete outside account of what took place during the 77 minutes between when the gunman began firing inside the classrooms and when the police finally stormed in and ended the May 24 massacre that left 19 students and two teachers dead.</p> <p>But the report found that a flawless police response would not have saved most of the victims, who suffered devastating injuries when they were shot with a high-powered AR-15-style rifle by a gunman who had been waiting for his 18th birthday to purchase the weapon legally.</p> <p>Some died on the way to the hospital, the report noted, adding in a final footnote that “it is plausible that some victims could have survived if they had not had to wait” for rescue.</p> <p>“If there’s only one thing that I can tell you is, there were multiple systemic failures,” State Representative Dustin Burrows, who spearheaded the investigation, said at a news conference on Sunday. “Several officers in the hallway or in that building knew or should have known there was dying in that classroom, and they should have done more, acted with urgency.”</p> <p>Mr. Burrows added that it would be up to the individual agencies to hold their officers accountable. The goal of the committee, he said, was to provide relatives of the victims and the public with information.</p> <p>The officers waited, the report found, even as at least one high-ranking official — the acting chief of the Uvalde Police Department — learned that a teacher was wounded but still alive and that a child had been calling 911 for help from inside the classrooms. The committee found that none of the officers who learned of the calls advocated for “shifting to an active shooter-style response or otherwise acting more urgently to breach the classrooms.”</p> <p>After the report came out, the mayor of Uvalde, Don McLaughlin, said the acting chief during the shooting, Lt. Mariano Pargas, had been placed on administrative leave and that the city had begun its own internal investigation. The city released body camera footage documenting the actions of the Uvalde officers at the scene.</p> <p>The facts laid out in the report also made clear that neither existing gun laws, nor expanded background checks passed by Congress in response to the shooting, would have prevented the gunman, Salvador Ramos, from obtaining the weapon he used.</p>

Though referred to by some peers as a “school shooter,” the gunman had no documented history that prevented him from purchasing a weapon. The Republican-controlled Texas Legislature has so far not considered any legislation restricting firearms in response to the Uvalde shooting, focusing much of its attention during public hearings on the police response and on security at schools.

While the narrative presented by the committee added disturbing new details, it did not substantially change the public understanding of what took place at Robb Elementary School as it has been [pieced together by The New York Times](#) and [other news organizations](#) over the intervening weeks.

Instead, it deepened the sense of a rudderless law enforcement response.

Officers massed on the north and south sides of the classrooms where the gunman was holed up, but they did not communicate with one another, the report found. Despite a search for a master key to the classrooms by the school police chief, Pete Arredondo, and others, no one called the principal, who had one. The usefulness of a specialized tool to pry open the door was tested but then rejected as too dangerous to officers.

The chief of the Uvalde police department called from his vacation to tell the acting chief, Lieutenant Pargas, to set up a command post. Mr. Pargas did so, in an office at a funeral home across the street, but then left it shortly thereafter. “This did not result in the establishment of an effective command post,” the report found.

The report found that of the four ballistics shields brought to the scene, “only the last shield, furnished by the U.S. Marshals, was rifle-rated.” It arrived at 12:21 p.m. — nearly 50 minutes after the gunman began shooting.

The findings served to clarify and solidify what had been a frequently shifting official account of events at the school. The report found that one reason that flawed information made its way into an initial news conference, held by Gov. Greg Abbott the day after the shooting, was that a Uvalde police lieutenant who had been at the scene and was supposed to brief the governor “literally passed out while waiting in the hallway beforehand.” A regional director for the state police held the briefing instead, but his information was secondhand, the report said.

Still, the facts of what unfolded were unclear even to some of the participants, the report found.

For example, one of the first officers at the school, a Uvalde police officer armed with an AR-15-style rifle, arrived to the sound of gunfire and saw a person dressed in black. The officer took cover, believing the person to be the gunman, and later [told other officers who responded](#) and investigators that he had not tried to fire at the person because of children nearby.

But the person had not been the gunman, the report found, but rather a school coach hustling children to safety.

False information spread among the officers who arrived outside, according to the report, and “likely prevented some of them from taking a more assertive role.”

The committee reached a more expansive conclusion about the nature of the failures than the one offered by the director of the state police, Steven McCraw, who has placed the blame in his public statements squarely on Mr. Arredondo.

The report found the “egregious poor decision making” went beyond Mr. Arredondo and included the dozens of well-armed officers from Mr. McCraw’s own agency, the Department of Public Safety, as well as the scores from the U.S. Border Patrol. Spokesmen for both agencies did not respond to requests for comment.

While many of the officers interviewed by the committee said that they considered Mr. Arredondo to be the incident commander, others said they were not aware of who was in charge, the report said, creating a chaotic vacuum of leadership that the larger state and federal agencies could have moved to fill but did not.

“Despite an obvious atmosphere of chaos, the ranking officers of other responding agencies did not approach the Uvalde C.I.S.D. chief of police,” the report said, referring to Mr. Arredondo, “or anyone else perceived to be in command to point out the lack of and need for a command post, or to offer that specific assistance.”

Yet even as details became clearer, the larger contours of what is known about the deadly event remained the same: The gunman entered the school without being confronted by any officer, through one of three exterior doors that were not locked, and went directly to the classrooms where he began shooting.

A lockdown alert was sent to school staff at the school, according to the report, but the staff might not have acted with urgency during the lockdown because of the frequent alerts related to nearby police chases and deliberate crashes of vehicles suspected of carrying undocumented migrants, known as “bailouts.” Not seeing any injured students in the hallways, one sergeant told the committee he thought it might be a “bailout” situation, the report said.

Still, as seen on a surveillance video released as part of the report, local police officers, including Mr. Arredondo, arrived minutes later but retreated down a hallway after being met with gunfire at the doorway to one of the classrooms. Even as more heavily armed officers arrived, along with ballistic shields, they did not attempt to enter the classroom again for over an hour.

That was the “wrong decision,” Mr. McCraw said in the days after, saying the call to do so had been made by Mr. Arredondo, who he said was the incident commander.

Mr. Arredondo told the committee that he did not consider himself to be in that role during the massacre and thought someone else would take that role. But the committee found that he should have been the incident commander, based on the school district’s own response plan for a school shooting, which calls for the school police chief to “become the person in control of the efforts of all law enforcement and first responders that arrive at the scene.”

Mr. Arredondo, in his own interview with the committee, said he might have acted to breach the classroom sooner had he known there were still victims alive inside. “We probably would have rallied a little more, to say, ‘Okay, someone is in there,’” he told the committee.

The school police chief “periodically attempted” to communicate with the gunman, both in English and Spanish, the report said, including immediately after four shots were fired inside the classroom.

“Mr. Ramos? Can you hear us, Mr. Ramos? Please respond,” Mr. Arredondo could be heard saying, according to a transcript reviewed by The Times.

The breakdown in communications was such that the acting Uvalde police chief, Lieutenant Pargas, told the committee that he was never in communication with Mr. Arredondo.

By the time the specialized Border Patrol agents, known as BORTAC, and others breached the classrooms, the report found, “tactical command inside the building had been de facto assumed by BORTAC.”

The three-member committee that prepared the report included two State House members — Mr. Burrows, a Lubbock Republican, and Joe Moody, an El Paso Democrat — as well as a former state Supreme Court Justice, Eva Guzman, who recently ran an unsuccessful Republican primary bid for attorney general.

	<p>During a solemn meeting with the committee on Sunday before the report's public release, more than 40 relatives of the 21 victims asked methodical questions about the committee's work and a more definitive timeline of events, said Arnulfo Reyes, a teacher who survived the shooting and attended the meeting.</p> <p>Jesus Rizo, the uncle of one of the victims, Jackie Cazares, said he was struck most by the lack of leadership at a time when the schoolchildren needed help the most.</p> <p>"The highlight was the inadequate response, the failure of leadership," Mr. Rizo said.</p> <p>Leonard Sandoval, whose grandson Xavier Lopez died on the way to the hospital after being shot at Robb Elementary, said the report laid bare what the community had long known: that officers failed to stop the shooter in time and then released misleading information to the public.</p> <p>Xavier, he later learned, had suffered a single shot in the back and was alive when the officers finally breached the classrooms. He was pronounced dead at a hospital, Mr. Sandoval said.</p> <p>"We all make mistakes. We are all human. But they should have admitted to it and then resigned," Mr. Sandoval said. "It's the lying that hurts."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/15 East I-90 road rage shooting turns deadly
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/eastbound-i-90-off-ramp-at-sprague-ave-blocked-due-to-heavy-police-presence/293-33114804-99f0-43fe-ad32-ea96e52542dd
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — A road rage shooting has led to the death of a driver on eastbound I-90 near Thor.</p> <p>According to Washington State Patrol (WSP) and Spokane police, the incident occurred around 9:45 p.m. Friday night. At least two cars were involved. One of the cars fired a gun at the driver in the opposite car. That driver was hit and exited at the eastbound I-90 off ramp on Sprague Ave. before crashing through a fence. Police pronounced the driver dead at the scene.</p> <p>WSP described the suspect as an African-American man driving a white Chevy Malibu.</p> <p>The eastbound I-90 off ramp on Sprague Ave. is currently closed as police continue to investigate the area.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Downtown Bellingham shootings: 2 injured
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/two-injured-after-shots-fired-during-fight-downtown-bellingham/J7ZBCNUKMVFCZKIWAMGKGLA43A/
GIST	<p>BELLINGHAM, Wash. — Police are investigating after two men were shot during a fight near a Bellingham nightclub overnight.</p> <p>Shortly after 12:01 a.m. on Sunday, Bellingham police responded to reports of shots fired in the downtown area near Underground Nightclub.</p> <p>Police say two groups of people were fighting near the nightclub when Gawain Orcutt got a handgun from an SUV, fired it in the air, then shot a 42-year old man, striking him in the foot.</p> <p>Orcutt then fired rounds at a 30-year-old man and a 25-year-old woman, damaging the car they were near, before he fled the scene.</p> <p>Bellingham Police K-9 Destro and his handler later found Orcutt walking downtown. He was arrested and booked into the Whatcom County Jail on three counts of assault in the first degree.</p> <p>Upon further investigation, police learned a second suspect involved in the fight also retrieved a gun and began firing into the crowd.</p>

	<p>A 20-year-old man was hit in the leg and was transported to the hospital with serious injuries.</p> <p>The 42-year-old man shot by Orcutt was also transported to the hospital for further treatment.</p> <p>BPD crime scene investigators reportedly recovered more than a dozen shell casings from two different weapons from the scene.</p> <p>Police are actively working to identify and locate the second shooter.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Catalytic converter theft attempt shootings
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/attempted-catalytic-converter-theft-leads-shooting-newcastle/AE44CYB3HNBWJJUURVDRGM5G5A/
GIST	<p>Neighbors in an upscale Newcastle community were stunned Sunday after an attempted catalytic converter theft led to a double shooting.</p> <p>Deputies said three men drove through the Avalon Bay Apartment complex looking to steal catalytic converters.</p> <p>That suspicious activity was noticed by a neighbor, and when he questioned the suspects, deputies said he was then shot.</p> <p>“It was loud and there were a lot of gunshots, and then you could hear a car speeding away really loud,” neighbor Chris Sheehan said.</p> <p>Sheehan was among the first people to help the victim.</p> <p>“This is a nice area. You walk around, you don’t think anything like this will happen and it does,” he said.</p> <p>Following that first shooting came a twist. That’s because the man who was shot was carrying a gun himself.</p> <p>After being shot in the leg, deputies said he returned fire, hitting one of the suspects.</p> <p>“Lock them up, have them in jail,” Sheehan said. “You know, they commit the crime, they get arrested, they get out hours later, days later.”</p> <p>The victim who was shot in the leg was taken to a nearby hospital and is expected to be OK.</p> <p>Later in the morning, deputies said a man suffering from a gunshot wound turned up at a nearby hospital. Investigators are trying to figure out if that man was one of the suspects in this case.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Bellevue PD anti-crime initiative: ‘hotspots’
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/bellevue/bellevue-police-launch-initiative-decrease-crime-levels-hotspots/281-82849cdd-c782-4ac9-a4c5-ccc916572650
GIST	<p>BELLEVUE, Wash. — Trev Dakan has owned Saltwater City in Bellevue for more than 20 years.</p> <p>While the exotic animals in his tanks are worth hundreds of dollars, thieves pass them over, preferring cash.</p> <p>“They try to get the money, they can’t really take the animals so they come in and try and go through the till and find the safe,” said Dakan.</p>

	<p>Dakan said he's seen more crime in the last ten years, but 2022 has particularly stood out.</p> <p>"I see a lot more activity in the evenings when I'm here late at night," said Dakan.</p> <p>Frying Fish in a nearby strip mall has also seen an increase in crime since originally opening eight years ago.</p> <p>"I think the crime is a bad thing but last year there was more crime than this year," said Leo Liu, the owner of Frying Fish.</p> <p>According to data from the Bellevue Police department, property crime did spike in 2020 and 2021.</p> <p>Theft is one of the most common crimes in the area, accounting for 26 percent of incidents.</p> <p>"We need to see more police around here to control that," said Liu.</p> <p>Bellevue police say because of this increase, they're upping their patrols as part of their anti-crime initiative. Police say in the last few weeks, they've already made many arrests.</p> <p>"It should help. Anytime they see police officers, it'll make them think twice," said Dakan.</p> <p>While they haven't seen a stark contrast, the patrols are a welcome sign to small business owners.</p> <p>Another big issue police are focusing on is catalytic converter thefts and DUIs. Bellevue police said that larger businesses have reached out, saying they've already seen a decrease in crime.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Capitol Hill shooting: 50 shell casings found
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/1-injured-50-shell-casings-found-after-capitol-hill-shooting-sunday-morning/
GIST	<p>Seattle police are investigating a shooting outside a Capitol Hill nightclub early Sunday that injured one man and damaged several businesses.</p> <p>The shooting occurred along the 1200 block of Pine Street at 2:30 a.m. on Sunday. Police officers already in the area heard gunshots and saw vehicles flee the scene, SPD Detective Valerie Carson said.</p> <p>At 2:45 a.m., a 35-year-old man showed up at Harborview Medical Center with a gunshot wound to his leg, Carson said. He told authorities he had been shot near a night club on the 1200 block of Pine Street.</p> <p>Detectives collected more than 50 shell casings and an unregistered gun at the scene of the shooting.</p> <p>"We found a variety of different sizes of shell casings, which just wouldn't have been possible to only come from one gun," Carson said. "Detectives were able to tell that there had been multiple guns fired."</p> <p>Carson did not share how many types of shell casings were recovered.</p> <p>Bullet holes riddled several establishments including a Warby Parker store, Mexican restaurant La Cocina Oaxaqueña, bike shop Rapha, and an empty retail space — all on Pine Street.</p> <p>Christopher Strode, the operations manager at Rapha, showed up to the bike store at 7:30 a.m. and quickly noticed some of its windows had bullet holes and were cracked.</p> <p>Sunday morning, Strode cleaned up glass on the ground and counted several bullet holes in three windows and the store's front door. Strode said the bike shop will remain closed until the windows get replaced.</p>

"It just puts a dent in the day," Strode said. "It sucks."

Strode added that despite what happened, Capitol Hill is still a fairly safe area in Seattle.

Misael Dominguez, who started La Cocina Oaxaqueña about 10 years ago, showed up to his restaurant Sunday morning to find bullet holes in eight of his windows. He and some of his employees began boarding up some of the damage, including the front door.

Inside, Dominguez collected more than five bullets, which punctured benches and seats, glass cups behind a bar counter and an air conditioning vent high up in his restaurant.

The only good thing was that his restaurant was closed at the time of the shooting and none of his employees or customers were hurt, Dominguez said.

Dominguez said Mint Lounge, a night club across the street, brings trouble to Pine Street in Capitol Hill. The night club's patrons tend to head to the alley next to his restaurant after last call on Friday and Saturday nights, he said.

The alley can get raucous at night, and police should do something about it, he said.

"Especially if they know this happens almost every time, they should be here at least on Friday or Saturday night and make everybody go home," Domniguez said.

This also isn't the first time bullets flew in his restaurant around last call. Back in February, Seattle police [responded to what they called a gunfight](#) in front of the Mint Lounge. Bullets flew through Dominguez's restaurant that night as gunfire was exchanged.

Now that his restaurant got shot at again just five months later, Dominguez said he's considering moving to somewhere else in Seattle, to be away from Mint Lounge.

Mint Lounge did not immediately return phone calls and emails from The Seattle Times.

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HEADLINE	07/17 New San Francisco DA cleans house
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/new-san-francisco-da-cleans-house-chesa-boudins-ouster-fires-15-employees-announces-new-hires
GIST	<p>The new district attorney in San Francisco is cleaning house after the ouster of her embattled progressive predecessor Chesa Boudin, firing at least 15 employees from the prosecutor's office.</p> <p>San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins, whom Mayor London Breed swore in eight days prior, issued a statement Friday saying she made "difficult, but important changes to my management team and staff that will help advance my vision to restore a sense of safety in San Francisco by holding serious and repeat offenders accountable and implementing smart criminal justice reforms."</p> <p>"I promised the public that I would restore accountability and consequences to the criminal justice system while advancing smart reforms responsibly," Jenkins said in the statement, reported by SF Gate. "My new management team, which will include the addition of three women of color, with decades of prosecutorial experience at the highest levels, will help our office deliver on that promise. I have full faith and confidence that these women will promote and protect public safety while delivering justice in all of its various forms."</p> <p>Among those on Jenkins' chopping block was Managing Attorney Arcelia Hurtado, who served as the district attorney's representative on the city's Innocence Commission, which Boudin established in 2020 to investigate potential wrongful convictions in San Francisco. Hurtado took to Twitter to express her frustration after losing her job.</p>

"After over 2 years of tireless and devoted service to the City and Cty of SF, I was unceremoniously fired without cause via phone by the Mayor's appointed DA," she tweeted. "I am the highest-ranking Latina/LGBTQ member of the management team at that office. I will continue the fight 4justice."

Lara Bazelon, law professor at the University of San Francisco and chair of the commission, called Hurtado's dismissal "concerning" because Hurtado "was the head of the DA's post-conviction review unit, which, among other things, is currently considering the petition by Mayor London Breed's brother Napoleon Brown to be granted leniency and released from prison following his conviction for carjacking and manslaughter."

In remarks to SF Gate, Bazelon added: "I can see no legitimate reason for firing an attorney as rigorous, competent and ethical as Arcelia."

Others to lose their jobs included Rachel Marshall and Simin Shamji, KHRON reported.

Meanwhile, Jenkins hired Ana Gonzalez as chief assistant, Nancy Tung as chief of special prosecutions & community partnerships, Tiffany Sutton as chief of alternative programs & initiatives & juvenile and Kulvidar "Rani" Singh Mann as senior transition advisor.

Boudin, a former public defender elected in 2019, [was ousted in a June 7 recall election](#) fueled by frustration over public safety in the deeply Democratic city. Viral video footage of people shoplifting and attacking seniors, particularly Asian Americans, rattled residents. Jenkins, who quit Boudin's office in 2021 to volunteer for the recall, is both Black and Latina. She is San Francisco's first Latina district attorney. Vice President Kamala Harris was the city's first Black DA.

Jenkins, who also considers herself a progressive prosecutor, said during the campaign that Boudin was too rigid. He eliminated cash bail for defendants and declared that minors would not be tried as adults, no matter how serious the crime. Jenkins said she would like those tools available for prosecutors to use at their discretion, according to The Associated Press.

Jenkins joined the San Francisco district attorney's office in 2014.

She said she plans to run in November to serve the rest of Boudin's term through 2023.

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HEADLINE	07/17 Uvalde families react mass shooting report
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/families-uvalde-victims-set-meet-committee-investigating-school/story?id=86669085
GIST	<p>The loved ones of those killed in a mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas, are reacting with anger and disappointment Sunday after a committee of state lawmakers investigating the massacre released a 77-page report that said law enforcement officers who responded to the rampage "failed to prioritize saving the lives of innocent victims over their own safety."</p> <p>The public release of the report came as the joint committee of the Texas Legislature met Sunday afternoon with the families of the victims and just days after security video footage from inside Robb Elementary School showing the delayed police response to the attack was leaked and obtained by two Texas news outlets.</p> <p>The committee's report laid out in detail the lapses in preparation, training and judgment in connection with the police response to one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history.</p> <p>"It's a joke. Texas failed the students. Law enforcement failed the students. Our government failed the students. What else do you want me to say? The truth is out there. Everybody saw the truth," Vincent Salazar, whose 11-year-old granddaughter, Layla Salazar, was killed in the attack, told ABC News.</p>

Salazar said he wasn't going to attend the meeting with the committee at Uvalde Junior College and was only there to pick up a copy of the report to take home and read through it thoroughly.

He said he believes the killer should have never made it into the school, let alone been allowed nearly 77 minutes to kill as numerous state, federal and local law enforcement officers waited in the hallway outside the classrooms where the shooter was holed up.

"If I were these officers, I would leave town," Salazar said. "They don't deserve to be here."

Sergio Garcia, whose 10-year-old son, Uziyah Sergio Garcia, was also killed in the mass shooting, agreed. "I get paid at my job to do my job. If I didn't do my job, I wouldn't be working," Garcia told reporters Sunday. "Now, they took an oath, had a badge, they had unlimited resources and they need to pay for what they did not do."

Garcia said he was "mad at everybody" who appeared to do nothing to save the 19 children and two teachers from being killed.

"In certain schools, they have police, sheriffs in the front. Why don't they protect our kids like they protect money in a vault at a bank?" Garcia said. "Our kids are more valuable than that money. This is not the first time a school has been shot up and kids have lost their lives. This need to be the last time this happens. It shouldn't happen anymore. Nobody should ever go through this."

The report paints the most complete portrait to date of the massacre, describing a series of "shortcomings and failures of the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District and of various agencies and officers of law enforcement."

But committee members said they do not know whether a faster or more competent response could have saved lives in the face of a heavily armed gunman who appeared bent on killing everybody in his sight with a high-powered assault rifle.

In addition to making its report public, the committee released video that captured the police response inside the schools.

The official release of the video comes after footage from inside the school as the attack was unfolding was leaked and obtained by Austin ABC affiliate KVUE and the Austin American-Statesman newspaper.

KVUE released a statement, saying, it and the Austin-Statesman elected to publish that footage "to provide transparency to the community, showing what happened as officials waited to enter that classroom."

KVUE and the American-Statesman both published an edited portion of the never-before-seen footage on Tuesday, ahead of Sunday's planned release of the video by state lawmakers. The outlets also published the unedited 77-minute version footage online.

Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin expressed anger over the video being leaked and aired before the families first had a chance to review it.

Following Sunday's meeting, committee members held a news conference to discuss their report and were met with anger and confusion from families and friends of those killed and injured in the shooting.

During the Q&A portion of the press conference, the committee was asked to address why there was so much confusion in the days and weeks following the shooting, and why some information was withheld from the families for hours and even days.

Rep. Joe Moody, who, during an emotional opening remark at the start of the press conference, referenced loss in the deadly El Paso shooting, told ABC News' Mireya Villarreal that the failure to communicate

accurate information to families in a timely matter hurt the situation and would be a big hurdle moving forward.

Rep. Dustin Burrows, the committee chairman, said the committee had planned to give the families the opportunity to see the video in private before it was released to the public and expressed disappointment that the two media outlets preempted those plans.

The leak of the video infuriated some of the victim's family members. Some saw it as the latest source of frustration with the investigation that has included inaccurate information from investigators and elected leaders, including an initial statement from Texas Gov. Greg Abbott that the school's police immediately engaged the gunman before he got into the school. Abbott later said he was "misled" about the circumstances of the shooting.

"They weren't supposed to do it without our consent," Javier Cazares, whose 9-year-old daughter, Jackie, was killed in the attack, told ABC News after the video was leaked.

Several of the families were meeting with lawmakers in Washington, D.C., Tuesday, when the video was aired on television and online. Despite the family members and some elected leaders, including Abbott, repeatedly calling for the video's release, the local district attorney denied the requests.

"We've been asking the DA for this video for a while and she refused to let us see it," Nikki Cross, the aunt of 10-year-old Uziyah Garcia, who was killed in the rampage, told ABC News. "So once again, the world got to see it before us. Just like the day of the shooting when Gov. Abbott announced to you all that our children are dead and we have no idea. It's like reliving that day all over again."

Christina Mitchell Busbee -- the 38th Judicial District Attorney, whose jurisdiction includes Uvalde County -- defended her now overridden decision not to release the video in an interview over the weekend with the Uvalde Leader-News, saying the move threatens to jeopardize the investigation, which she said is ongoing and could lead to possible criminal charges if anyone is found to have aided the suspect in planning the attack.

"My goal is to secure justice for the victims, their families, and the citizens of the 38th Judicial District," Busbee told the newspaper. "This goal cannot be accomplished unless there is a thorough investigation buttressed by fairness, integrity and impartiality free from political and media pressures."

Burrows said the committee's release of the video and report are intended to provide transparency to the families of those killed despite guidance from the local district attorney that the footage remain under wraps.

The video published by the news outlets and now released by the committee, including police body-camera video and footage from a surveillance camera mounted in a hallway of the school, shows dozens of law enforcement officers waiting in the hallway outside the adjoined classrooms where the gunman was committing the mass shooting. The officers -- including some with protective shields, wearing tactical armor and armed with high-powered rifles -- didn't breach the classroom for more than 70 minutes, even as additional volleys of gunfire could be heard on the video from the classrooms 45 minutes after police arrived on the scene, the footage released by the news organizations shows.

"The report says if you're not willing to put the lives of the people you serve, of those children before your own, in my view, should find another job," committee member and former Texas Supreme Court Justice Eva Guzman said at the news conference.

The video began by showing the 18-year-old suspect, wearing tactical gear and wielding a high-powered AR-15 style weapon, entering the school unabated at 11:33 a.m. on May 24 and walking down the hallway to the classrooms. A barrage of gunfire could be heard on the footage soon after the gunman entered the school.

	<p>Three minutes after the killer entered the school, three police officers, wearing bullet-proof vests and guns drawn, are seen running down the hallway toward the classrooms where the gunman was holed up, while at least four other officers entered the school and took cover, the video shows. Moments later, the three officers who charged down the hallway are seen in the video retreating after coming under fire.</p> <p>Police eventually breached the classroom and killed the gunman 77 minutes after he entered the school, authorities said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Indianapolis-area mall shooting: 4 dead
SOURCE	https://www.indystar.com/story/news/crime/2022/07/17/greenwood-park-mall-shooting-indianapolis/65375408007/
GIST	<p>A lone man with a long gun killed three people before an armed bystander killed him in the Greenwood Park Mall food court Sunday evening, according to Greenwood Police Chief Jim Ison. Two people were injured.</p> <p>"It appears that he had a rifle with several magazines of ammunition, entered the food court and began shooting," Ison said.</p> <p>The "good Samaritan" who shot the man with the rifle was a 22-year-old man from Bartholomew County, Indiana, Ison said.</p> <p>"The real hero of the day is the citizen that was lawfully carrying a firearm in that food court and was able to stop the shooter almost as soon as he began," he said.</p> <p>One of the wounded was a 12-year-old girl with a minor injury.</p> <p>The other victims ranged in age from early 20s to 30, and all but one were female.</p> <p>The shooting happened around the mall's 6 p.m. closing time; the first emergency calls were received at 6:05 p.m.</p> <p>A bomb squad was called because an unattended backpack - later "cleared" by authorities - was found in the bathroom near the food court. The FBI, ATF, Department of Homeland Security and Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department are assisting in the investigation.</p> <p>"You are seeing the best that public safety has to offer right now behind us," Chris Bailey, IMPD assistant chief, said at the scene. "We are sickened by yet another type of incident like this in our country, in our city."</p> <p>Chris Roy, assistant manager of the mall's Van's shoe store, was working Sunday when he saw people running through the hallway, away from the food court, just before closing.</p> <p>"So, I jumped over the counter, locked the door, gathered my associates and other managers at the back door," said Roy, 30.</p> <p>They hadn't heard gunshots, but Roy said they saw enough people running to not ask questions. Through the back door they huddled in an interior hallway with about 40 or 50 other people – mostly customers from other stores, Roy said. That hallway didn't have an exterior exit, so they waited for police to come clear them, he said. Roy and another man tried to keep everyone calm, but occasional footsteps on the other side of one of the connecting doors sent panic through the group.</p> <p>"We just instructed everybody to keep quiet," he said.</p> <p>After 10 or 15 minutes, police cleared them from the hallway and escorted them out of the mall.</p>

	<p>Roy said he hadn't called anyone while he was waiting in the hallway, but he did once he was out and safe.</p> <p>"I called my mom."</p> <p>Greenwood Mayor Mark W. Myers issued a statement Sunday night: "This tragedy hits at the core of our community. Please offer your prayers to the victims and our first responders."</p> <p>Greenwood is a city of about 60,000 just south of Indianapolis in Johnson County.</p> <p>U.S. Sen. Todd Young, an Indiana Republican, tweeted this response to the shooting: "Terrible news tonight in my home county. Praying for the victims of a shooting at the Greenwood Park Mall."</p> <p>The Greenwood Park Mall is one of nine Simon Property Group malls in Indiana. Located at the intersection of U.S. 31 North and County Line Road, it has more than 130 indoor and outdoor restaurants and shops. IndyStar has reached out to the company for comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 California armored car jewelry heist: \$10M
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/wireStory/millions-jewels-stolen-armored-truck-california-86979237
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES -- Millions of dollars worth of gems and jewelry were stolen in an armored truck robbery last week in Southern California, authorities said Sunday.</p> <p>The Brink's truck was robbed in the early morning on July 11 near Los Angeles, said Dana Callahan, a spokeswoman for the security company.</p> <p>The merchandise had been loaded onto the truck late on July 10 following an exhibit hosted by the International Gem and Jewelry Show in San Mateo, south of San Francisco, said Brandy Swanson, the group's director. It was going to an event at the Pasadena Convention Center just northeast of Los Angeles, she said.</p> <p>Swanson said between 25 and 30 bags were taken, containing an unknown number of individual pieces. She said 18 victims were reporting more than \$100 million in losses. Callahan said it was less than \$10 million.</p> <p>"According to the information the customers provided to us before they shipped their items, the total value of the missing items is less than \$10 million," Brink's said in a statement. "We are working with law enforcement, and we will fully reimburse our customers for the value of their assets that were stolen, in accordance with the terms of our contract."</p> <p>Laura Eimiller, spokeswoman for the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Los Angeles, said the robbery was in the desert city of Lancaster in northern LA County. Eimiller said the bureau agency was working with local authorities, but she could not immediately provide more information.</p> <p>A dispatcher with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, which patrols Lancaster, didn't have information about the investigation on Sunday.</p> <p>Swanson said vendors who travel between jewelry shows typically underinsure their merchandise because they can't afford to insure it fully.</p> <p>"That's where the discrepancy comes in. These are mom-and-pop operators," Swanson said. "They're devastated. Some of these people have lost their entire livelihoods."</p> <p>The International Gem and Jewelry show hosts about 45 shows nationwide per year, she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Gang violence deepens Haiti crisis
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/gang-violence-inflation-food-insecurity-deepen-haiti-crisis/story?id=86941317
GIST	<p>July marked one year since Haiti's president was assassinated and it appears the country's crisis has only deepened as gang activity has surged over the past months in and around the nation's capital city.</p> <p>Haiti is no stranger to political turmoil, and on July 7, 2021, a dark history reemerged when the country's president, Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated by a group of gunmen at his home. The killing brought a country already experiencing violent gang violence and protests of authoritarian rule cascading further into chaos.</p> <p>A little more than a month later, Haiti would be rocked by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake - killing more than 2,000 people and leaving thousands more injured. The earthquake caused devastating damage to buildings, homes, and schools particularly in rural areas where approximately 80% of the affected populations live.</p> <p>According to a recent United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report dated June 2, at least 188 people have been killed in Port-au-Prince, including 96 suspected gang members due to gang violence and nearly 17,000 people have been displaced since late April.</p> <p>"We have encountered corpses that are decomposing or being burned," said Medecins Sans (MSF), Doctors Without Border, in a statement this week. "They could be people killed during the clashes or people trying to leave who were shot - it is a real battlefield."</p> <p>The United Nations Security Council unanimously approved a resolution Friday on a 15-0 vote that calls on all countries to stop the transfer of small arms, light weapons and ammunition to any party in crisis-torn Haiti supporting gang violence and criminal activity, the Associated Press reported.</p> <p>The resolution drafted by the United States and Mexico expresses "grave concern about the extremely high levels of gang violence and other criminal activities, including kidnappings and homicides, and sexual and gender-based violence, as well as ongoing impunity for perpetrators, and the implications of Haiti's situation in the region," according to the Associated Press report. It also extended the "BINUH" mission in Haiti until July 15, 2023.</p> <p>The immediate impact of the resolution however remains unclear. Heavily armed gangs have blocked roads throughout the north and south, stifling humanitarian assistance from reaching the most vulnerable.</p> <p>In the Cité Soleil neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, malnutrition rates have increased with 20% of children under five suffering from acute malnutrition, the OCHA reported.</p> <p>According to a statement this week from The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), "Insecurity in and around Port-au-Prince has been drastically worsening since early May, disrupting nation-wide supply chains, access to basic services like markets, schools and hospitals and livelihoods of Haitians across the country. The violence is causing a serious protection crisis and making it harder for people to access and afford food."</p> <p>"This comes against the backdrop of the global food crisis where rising costs linked to the conflict in Ukraine are compounding woes. Haiti is already seeing staggering inflation to the tune of 26 percent. The island nation is particularly vulnerable to shocks in the global food and fuel markets as it imports 70 percent of its cereals. On top of these challenges, the ongoing Atlantic Hurricane season is expected to be more active than normal putting at risk lives and livelihoods of vulnerable Haitians," the WFP continued.</p> <p>The road blockades have created serious security concerns for humanitarian operations.</p> <p>"The only safe option for humanitarians to move is by air, and without adequate funding, UNHAS [United Nations Humanitarian Air Service], faces imminent closure by the end of July 2022. Ultimately, this puts</p>

	<p>not only WFP's assistance but humanitarian operations across the country at risk," said Jean-Martin Bauer, WFP Country Director in Haiti.</p> <p>And as Haiti battles multiple crisis at home, it also faces potential impacts from an ongoing Atlantic Hurricane Season.</p> <p>The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has forecasted an above-normal 2022 hurricane season, which runs from June through November, with three to six storms that may reach category 3, 4 or 5.</p> <p>Haiti seems to be facing an uncertain future ahead.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/17 Police thwart planned arena mass shooting
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/memphis-police-thwart-potential-mass-shooting-arena-officials/story?id=86962786
GIST	<p>A 28-year-old man distraught over a breakup with his girlfriend was arrested after police alleged he planned to shoot people leaving an event at an arena in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, according to authorities.</p> <p>Elijah Hyman was arrested at his apartment early Saturday on a charge of commission of an act of terrorism, according to a statement from the Memphis Police Department.</p> <p>Hyman allegedly threatened to commit a mass shooting targeting people leaving the FedExForum in Memphis, police said.</p> <p>Police did not specify the date of the planned attack or the event, but rapper Yo Gotti said his annual birthday bash performance at the Forum Friday night was the target.</p> <p>"We were informed of a potential threat regarding an individual seeking to harm attendees leaving (the) Birthday Bash that occurred 3 hours after our show ended," Yo Gotti, a Memphis rapper whose real name is Mario Mims, said in a post on Twitter Saturday. "I would also like to thank the Memphis Police Department for their swift and proactive action in ensuring that all attendees returned home safely."</p> <p>Yo Gotti's concert ended several hours before officers responded to Hyman's apartment just blocks from the arena.</p> <p>Officers initially responded to Hyman's apartment around 2:45 a.m. Saturday for an "armed mental consumer call," according to the police statement. Hyman was taken into custody after police spoke to him and his girlfriend, officials said.</p> <p>"Officers were advised that since Hyman and his girlfriend's relationship was coming to an end, he wanted to kill himself and everyone he saw coming from an event being held at the FedExForum," the Memphis police said in a statement.</p> <p>Police said Hyman was detained and placed in handcuffs before being taken to a hospital for a mental evaluation and to be treated for a cut to his hand that he sustained from a broken window in his residence, authorities said.</p> <p>The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives was contacted about the incident, police said.</p> <p>Yo Gotti, who was born and raised in Memphis, began staging his annual birthday bash concert in 2012. The concert had been canceled in 2020 and 2021 during to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>

	During Friday's sold-out performance, which was live streamed online, the rapper, according to the Memphis Commercial Appeal newspaper, began the concert by telling the crowd, "My city! Let's go!"
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HEADLINE	07/17 Stores hire security, limit hours fight crime
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/supermarkets-restaurants-hire-security-limit-hours-to-combat-crime-11658062981?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	<p>Restaurants and grocery stores said they are revamping operations in response to crime, with some operators limiting hours, spending more on security and closing stores entirely.</p> <p>Starbucks Corp. last week said that it was permanently closing 16 U.S. stores after workers reported incidents related to drug use and other disruptions, and would likely close more. Casual dining chain Noodles & Co. has encountered drug use in bathrooms in certain markets, and is training workers on how to respond, Chief Executive Dave Boennighausen said. Supermarket giant Kroger Co. last year listed organized theft among the factors pressuring its profit margins for the first time.</p> <p>During an internal forum at Starbucks's headquarters Wednesday, interim CEO Howard Schultz said the stores were profitable, but the company was closing them because of employees' safety concerns.</p> <p>"We are facing things that the stores weren't built for," Mr. Schultz said. "We are listening to our people and closing stores." He said local governments must do more to fight crime and mental illness as the need to address safety has grown.</p> <p>Food-oriented establishments and consumers are airing increased concerns over crime as U.S. consumers have resumed shopping in stores and dining out, after governments and businesses lifted Covid-19 restrictions. Forty-four percent of 1,005 adults surveyed earlier this month said they were more fearful to be in public because of bad behavior and rising violence, up from 39% in March, according to a national online survey by food-service research firm Lisa W. Miller & Associates LLC.</p> <p>Violent crime has been on the rise in the U.S. since the onset of the pandemic, with cities including Seattle, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York reporting a surge in shootings and killings. Murder rates have also soared in rural areas. Local officials and law enforcement point to pandemic-related stress, a proliferation of guns and increased alcohol sales, among other factors.</p> <p>While violent crimes in restaurants and grocery stores remain a small part of the overall U.S. total, incidents have increased in recent years, according to Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics. The number of aggravated assaults that took place in restaurants increased by 60% from 2018 to 2020, the FBI data showed, and the number in grocery stores increased by 73% during the period.</p> <p>Becky Mulligan said she answered a call this month from one of her Mod Super Fast Pizza Holdings LLC store managers, who said an armed robber had hit one of the Bellevue, Wash.-based chain's stores.</p> <p>Ms. Mulligan, senior vice president of operations for the 520-store pizza chain, said she has had to respond to more incidents of violence, theft and robberies affecting the chain over the past six months, particularly as gas prices have risen and the economy has cooled.</p> <p>"There seems to be a layer of stress going into the restaurants, more than it used to," she said. About six weeks ago, after an armed gunman entered one of Mod's West Coast stores, a manager put herself in front of a young crew member working at the cash register, Ms. Mulligan said.</p> <p>Mod is installing more panic buttons in its stores, and offering emotional support resources to employees after an incident. Employees are instructed to never leave the back doors of restaurants open, and the company limits hours if working at night feels unsafe, she said.</p>

Some Burger King and [McDonald's](#) Corp. franchisees said they have had to deal with crime in parking lots and people loitering in stores, particularly at night.

Store safety issues at supermarkets, driven by theft and homelessness, have become a bigger challenge in recent years, merchants say. They said they are hiring more security guards and locking up theft-prone products, while coaching employees on how to manage conflicts.

Kosta Drosos, general manager of Fresh Market Place in Chicago's Bucktown neighborhood, said the store has long dealt with crime, and homeless people asking customers for money or products. He said he and some employees six months ago found a man shooting up heroin in one store's staff bathroom, and escorted him out.

"Nothing is out of the ordinary anymore," said Mr. Drosos.

Fresh Market gives all employees safety training and coaches them to avoid confrontations and diffuse conflicts, he said. Earlier this month, Mr. Drosos said, store management discussed whether managers should carry weapons in the store, and decided they wouldn't for now.

U.S. grocers have said they are working to protect staff and operations in response to what some said are a growing number of crime and safety-related incidents in their stores over the past few years, grocery trade group FMI said in a July report. About 72% of 18 food retailers representing over 12,000 stores surveyed by FMI said they have plans in place to deal with violence prevention, while 88% said they are ready to deal with robberies.

Doug Baker, who oversees industry relations at FMI, said retailers have long dealt with crime and disruptions, but instances have increased as more people face [rising inflation and tighter budgets](#).

Good Food Holdings LLC Chief Executive Neil Stern said homeless people camp outside of some of the grocery chain's stores, sometimes harassing employees and customers or stealing prepared food. The company, which owns New Seasons Market and Bristol Farms chains on the West Coast, has also been struck by organized shoplifting that typically affects general merchandise and over-the-counter medicine.

"We've had incidents where we had to close stores for a period of time, or close stores early," Mr. Stern said. In response, the grocer has hired more security, he said, and in some cases changed layouts of stores so that they aren't as familiar to potential thieves.

Theft is a growing problem for U.S. retailers, executives said, partly as organized crime rings steal from stores, then sell goods online. Kroger, [CVS Health](#) Corp. and other major retailers [have cited theft as a growing pressure](#) on their businesses.

New York-based Morton Williams Supermarkets is placing on shelves smaller quantities of items that often get stolen such as bacon, smoked salmon and some ice cream, said Steve Schwartz, director of sales and marketing at the grocery chain. Tide detergent products have also been targeted by thieves, he said, and the grocer now puts most of those items behind the counter.

Mr. Schwartz said Morton is spending more on security while losing money on stolen items. "It's a lose, lose, lose all the way around," he said.

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HEADLINE	07/16 Capture signals tension ease US, Mexico?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/16/mexicos-capture-of-drug-kingpin-could-be-signal-to/
GIST	MEXICO CITY (AP) — The United States' motivation to find infamous drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero was never in doubt - hence the \$20 million reward for information leading to his capture - there was less certainty about the commitment of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who had made clear his disinterest in pursuing drug lords.

Yet on Friday, three days after López Obrador and U.S. President Joe Biden met in the White House, the most wanted target of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration - the man allegedly responsible for the murder of a DEA agent more than three decades ago - was in Mexican custody.

A bloodhound roused him from the undergrowth as Mexican marines closed in deep in the mountains of his native state of Sinaloa.

The arrest came at a heavy cost: Fourteen Mexican marines died and another was injured when a navy Blackhawk helicopter crashed during the operation. The navy said it appeared to have been an accident, with the cause under investigation.

Mexico's Attorney General's Office said in a statement late Friday that Caro Quintero was arrested for extradition to the U.S. and would be held at the maximum security Altiplano prison about 50 miles west of Mexico City.

DEA Administrator Anne Milgram celebrated the capture of a man especially despised by U.S. officials for the torture and murder of DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena in 1985. "Our incredible DEA team in Mexico worked in partnership with Mexican authorities to capture and arrest Rafael Caro Quintero", she said in a message to the agency late Friday. "Today's arrest is the result of years of your blood, sweat, and tears."

Cooperation between the DEA and Mexico's marines had led to some of the highest-profile captures during previous administrations, but not under López Obrador, noted security analyst David Saucedo.

"It seems to me that in the private talks between President Joe Biden and Andrés Manuel (López Obrador) they surely agreed to turning over high-profile drug traffickers again, which had been suspended," Saucedo said.

Both presidents face domestic pressure to do more against drug traffickers. With Caro Quintero's arrest, "Narcos are being captured again and I believe that clearly it was what was in fact needed," Saucedo said.

U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar said in a statement Saturday that no U.S. personnel participated directly in the tactical operation that led to the capture of the drug lord. "The apprehension of Caro Quintero was exclusively conducted by the Mexican government."

Samuel González, who founded the organized crime office in Mexico's Attorney General's Office and now is a security analyst, said the capture may not have a major effect on the map of organized crime in Mexico, as Caro Quintero was not as powerful as decades ago, and it might even generate more violence in territories such as Sonora, at the US border.

But he said that to López Obrador's benefit, the arrest "shows evidence that there's no protection of capos" by his administration.

González believes Caro Quintero has long been a thorn in the bilateral relationship, but said that "without doubt" his capture was fruit of the recent negotiations in Washington.

"The Americans never stopped pressing for his arrest," González said.

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland and Salazar expressed gratitude for Mexico's capture of the man blamed for killing Camarena - a case that brought a low point in U.S.-Mexico relations.

"This achievement is a testament to Mexico's determination to bring to justice someone who terrorized and destabilized Mexico during his time in the Guadalajara Cartel; and is implicated in the kidnapping, torture and murder of DEA agent Kiki Camarena," Salazar said in a statement late Friday.

Garland said the U.S. government would seek his immediate extradition.

“My hope is that with the capture of Caro Quintero, that that will mend a lot of tensions between the DEA and Mexico“, said Mike Vigil, the DEA’s former chief of international operations.

Mexico’s navy and Attorney’s General Office led the operation deep in the mountains that straddle the border between Sinaloa and Chihuahua states, many miles from any paved road. They found Caro Quintero, with help of “Max,” hiding in brush in a place in Sinaloa called San Simon.

López Obrador said that the helicopter that crashed in the coastal city of Los Mochis had been supporting the operation against Caro Quintero. U.S. officials expressed condolences for the marines who died.

Caro Quintero came from Badiraguato, Sinaloa, the same township as Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, the former leader of the Sinaloa cartel, which formed later. Caro Quintero was one of the founders of the Guadalajara cartel and according to the DEA was one of the primary suppliers of heroin, cocaine and marijuana to the United States in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Caro Quintero had blamed Camarena for a raid on a huge marijuana plantation in 1984. The next year, Camarena was kidnapped in Guadalajara, allegedly on orders from Caro Quintero. His tortured body was found a month later.

Caro Quintero was captured in Costa Rica in 1985 and was serving a 40-year sentence in Mexico when an appeals court overturned his verdict in 2013. The Supreme Court upheld the sentence, but it was too late - Caro Quintero had been spirited off in a waiting vehicle.

Caro Quintero was added to FBI’s 10 most wanted list in 2018 with a \$20 million reward for his capture.

López Obrador had previously seemed ambivalent about his case.

Last year, the president said the legal appeal that led to Caro Quintero’s release was “justified” because supposedly no verdict had been handed down against the drug lord after 27 years in jail. López Obrador also depicted a later warrant for his re-arrest as an example of U.S. pressure.

“Once he was out, they had to look for him again, because the United States demanded he shouldn’t have been released, but legally the appeal was justified,” López Obrador said.

Presidential spokesman Jesús Ramírez said at the time, “The president was just saying that it was a legal aberration that the judge had not issued a verdict on Mr. Caro Quintero after 27 years ... but he was not defending his release.”

Mexican reporter Anabel Hernandez twice interviewed the fugitive Caro Quintero in the mountains of northern Mexico without revealing the location. Caro Quintero claimed in those interviews that he was no longer involved in the drug trade.

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HEADLINE	07/15 Uvalde top officials sought heroic narrative
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/15/us/uvalde-police.html
GIST	<p>HOUSTON — Days after the massacre at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, the leaders of the grieving city fumed during a closed-door meeting with Steven McCraw, the state’s top police official.</p> <p>They objected to Mr. McCraw’s public criticism of the response by city police officers to the May 24 massacre that killed 19 children and two teachers and, in a one-page document, laid out their own version of events, one that praised the officers for initially rushing to the gunfire and saving hundreds of other children in the school.</p>

The document prepared by Uvalde officials and labeled “narrative” was obtained by The New York Times after a public information request. Its account of events differed in significant aspects from the one described by Mr. McCraw’s agency, the Department of Public Safety, which is leading the police investigation into the shooting and the law enforcement response.

The Uvalde officials pushed the document across the table to Mr. McCraw, asking him to publicly endorse it, according to a state police official who requested anonymity to describe the meeting on June 2. Mr. McCraw refused.

The heated encounter at Uvalde City Hall, which has not been previously reported, was among the earliest indications of a simmering feud between state and local officials that has since exploded into public view over who should be blamed for the 77 minutes it took heavily armed officers to kill the gunman after he first entered Robb Elementary School.

The competing accounts have obscured the actions of the police and angered the victims’ families, who have pleaded for reliable information. The clearest picture yet is expected to come on Sunday when a Texas House committee is set to report the results of its investigation, one of several overlapping inquiries into what took place.

The committee’s report was expected to spread blame beyond Chief Pete Arredondo, the head of the small Uvalde school district police force who Mr. McCraw has said was principally responsible for a law enforcement response that he has called an “[abject failure](#).”

Instead, the committee was expected to find fault broadly among the several law enforcement agencies and officers that responded, including dozens of officers from the U.S. Border Patrol, the local sheriff’s office and the Department of Public Safety, according to a person familiar with the investigation.

The conclusion, the person said, would be that the delayed response was not one person’s failure, but rather that of dozens of trained officers and supervisors. Nobody knew what was going on and nobody tried to take charge, the person said, citing failures of inaction and communication by the agencies.

Such a finding would echo what others have already concluded after studying the sometimes contradictory versions of events offered by state and local officials.

“There was no incident commander, that’s the truth of the matter — it was complete system failure,” said State Senator Roland Gutierrez, who represents the area and has been critical of the version presented by the state police that holds no other law enforcement agencies accountable. “Why didn’t they take command and control of the situation?” he asked.

Mr. McCraw had said that Chief Arredondo had been in charge at the scene and had made “[the wrong decision](#)” in treating the gunman as barricaded inside the classroom — a situation that would call for a more careful, tactical approach — rather than as someone who was actively shooting and whom officers are trained to immediately confront. Chief Arredondo has not spoken publicly but said [in an interview with The Texas Tribune](#) that he did not see himself as the incident commander.

In the account the Uvalde officials laid out in their narrative, they focused on the quick arrival of officers at the school and their success in containing the gunman inside a pair of connected classrooms while clearing children from the rest of the school. They described a scene that was dangerous to officers and a response that was not chaotic but focused on getting children to safety.

“There was zero hesitation on any of these officers’ part, they moved directly toward the gunfire,” the document said, only to be repelled when the gunman fired at them. Two of the officers were grazed by debris from the gunfire.

“The total number of persons saved by the heroes that are local law enforcement and the other assisting agencies is over 500 per U.C.I.S.D.,” the document said, referring to Chief Arredondo’s department, the

Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District police force. “But for U.P.D. and U.C.I.S.D. being on scene IMMEDIATELY, that shooter would have had free range on the school.”

The document also said that specially trained Border Patrol agents had been pushing to clear the other classrooms first. “BORTAC insisted that all the rooms be cleared, i.e. all the children and teachers be removed, PRIOR to use of the shields and breach of Room 112,” the document said.

“Absent the shields, every U.P.D. officer was of the opinion that breaching the door was suicide and every Texas Ranger or D.P.S. agent who took their statements agreed,” the document read. “Not a single officer present, including D.P.S. troopers and Texas Rangers, believed that they could save lives by approaching that door and being killed one by one.”

That description conflicted with the account Mr. McCraw has presented of officers not following standard training, developed after the deadly shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, that calls for officers to quickly confront a gunman and end the shooting. At a hearing in the State Capitol last month, Mr. McCraw said officers had enough firepower to confront the gunman [within three minutes of his entering the school](#), but had been prevented from doing so by Chief Arredondo.

The Uvalde officials, in their document, made no reference to a lack of keys as a reason for the delayed confrontation with the gunman, which Chief Arredondo had said in his interview was another big reason for the delay.

Instead, they defended the protracted response, saying that the extended time period before confronting the gunman was “not wasted but each minute was used to save lives of children and teachers.”

Some of the footage from the scene raises questions about the city’s account.

Video from the hallway of Robb Elementary — which was reviewed by The Times last month and published by The Austin American-Statesman this week — made clear that shields began arriving in the hallway outside the classrooms long before the officers moved in.

And several Border Patrol agents had [expressed frustration](#) at the lengthy delay in getting clearance to enter the classroom, a person briefed on the investigation told The Times.

The gathering at Uvalde City Hall had been arranged by Gov. Greg Abbott’s office because of rising tensions between Uvalde officials, including Mayor Don McLaughlin and the county judge, Bill Mitchell, and state police officials.

By that point, more than a week after the shooting, Mr. McLaughlin had requested that the Justice Department conduct its own review of the shooting, an indication that he did not trust the state police to impartially review the actions by officers.

And several key points about the shooting and the police response had already changed during a series of news conferences convened by the state. For instance, Mr. Abbott, speaking in Uvalde a day after the massacre, said that “the reason it was not worse is because law enforcement officials did what they do,” and praised “their quick response.” The governor later said he had been “misled” about the facts.

After the video from the hallway emerged, Mr. Abbott told reporters on Thursday that “none of the information in that video was shared with me on that day.”

Also in attendance at the June meeting was the local district attorney, Christina Mitchell Busbee, and the Uvalde city attorney. The mayor, county judge and local district attorney did not respond to requests for comment. A spokesman for the state police declined to comment.

Mr. Abbott’s chief of staff attended the meeting, as did his general counsel, who sought to play the role of mediators.

	<p>But things quickly went off the rails, the senior official said.</p> <p>The Uvalde officials voiced their strong displeasure with Mr. McCraw. Early in the roughly hourlong meeting, the city attorney presented the document, which was the product of interviews with police officers who responded to the scene, the senior official said. The Uvalde officials wanted Mr. McCraw to have another news conference in which he would present the narrative from the document. He told them he did not agree with its summary, the senior official said.</p> <p>Ms. Busbee, the district attorney, also objected to its release and argued the point with the city attorney, the senior official said. Some in the room raised their voices.</p> <p>“I objected to the release of any information given that the Texas Rangers had only begun their investigation and there was no way to assess whether that narrative was accurate,” Ms. Busbee said in an email. “I was concerned with the release of inaccurate or incomplete information that would adversely affect the investigation and further traumatize the families.”</p> <p>The document was not made public at the time.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/16 Egypt's revolving jailhouse door
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/07/16/world/middleeast/egypt-prisoners.html
GIST	<p>CAIRO — When the University of Washington Ph.D. student was arrested in Cairo while researching the Egyptian judiciary, he asked the prosecutor for the accusations against him. Joining a terrorist group, he was told, and spreading fake news.</p> <p>“I was pleased for a second, because these are so absurd, there’s absolutely no evidence, it’s very, very easy to refute,” said the student, Waleed K. Salem, 42. But as he found out, “Once you’re slapped with these labels, you go into the black box.”</p> <p>He was now trapped. Held in pretrial detention, Mr. Salem was never tried or formally charged with a crime. Instead, every time he maxed out the legal detention period, a prosecutor extended his imprisonment in a hearing that usually lasted about 90 seconds.</p> <p>“The first five months, you’re trying to convince yourself it’s just five months,” Mr. Salem said. “But after five months come and go and you’re still there, now you start to fear the worst.”</p> <p>President Biden’s meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia on Friday was a conspicuous U-turn for the president, who once pledged to ostracize the prince over human rights atrocities.</p> <p>But Mr. Biden will meet another Arab leader in Jeddah on Saturday whose human rights record he has also denounced: Egypt’s president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.</p> <p>Egypt holds tens of thousands of political prisoners, according to rights groups and researchers, their ranks swelled by Mr. el-Sisi’s crushing campaign against dissent.</p> <p>Mr. el-Sisi’s predecessors also jailed critics. But he has done so on a vastly greater scale, largely by transforming the routine administrative procedure of pretrial detention into Egypt’s chief engine of mass repression.</p> <p>Security forces arrest people from the street or from their homes, disappearing them without notifying families or lawyers. When the detainees surface in custody, prosecutors accuse them of terrorist activity and detain them for months or years on end without ever having to prove their case at trial.</p>

The crackdown that ensnared Mr. Salem in 2018 has caught up Egyptians of every stripe, branding them as enemies of the state for even the mildest criticisms. One case involved the arrest of a politician mulling running against Mr. el-Sisi; another, two women on a Cairo subway overheard complaining about rising fares; yet another, a young conscript who posted a Facebook meme of Mr. el-Sisi wearing Mickey Mouse ears.

Some political prisoners have had trials, if only perfunctory ones, and have faced harsh sentences.

But pretrial detainees are not granted even such cursory justice.

In the special terrorism courts where the el-Sisi government funnels political opponents, the authorities do not file formal charges, present evidence or, in many cases, allow detainees to defend themselves before locking them up.

No public records exist of how many people are held in pretrial detention. But an analysis by The New York Times of handwritten court logs, painstakingly kept by volunteer defense lawyers, shows for the first time the number of individuals detained without trial and exposes the circular legal process that can keep them there indefinitely.

To estimate how many people were caught in the loop, The Times [matched the handwritten names and case numbers](#) of people who made multiple court appearances. Alternate spellings and duplicate case numbers were often used, making a perfect record impossible. But we wrote custom software to screen them and carefully checked each record to account for similar spellings.

The true total is likely greater than our estimate, which is only a partial snapshot of the system.

The estimate leaves out detainees who were arrested and released before the five-month mark, the first time a court appearance is required. Nor does it include Egyptians prosecuted outside the capital. And there is no public accounting of prisoners held off the books in police stations and military camps or those who have simply vanished.

“More and more ordinary people have been swept up,” said Khaled Ali, a rights lawyer. Pretrial detention is supposed to give the authorities time to investigate cases, he said. “But in reality, it’s being used as a punishment.”

Human rights groups estimate that Egypt holds 60,000 political prisoners, a number that includes pretrial detainees as well as those who have been tried and sentenced, terrorism suspects as well as those accused of simply having wayward political opinions.

Egypt has long denied holding any political detainees. People arrested on accusations of criticizing the authorities, officials say, are threatening public order.

“Even protesting — there’s a law against it,” Salah Sallam, a former member of Egypt’s government-appointed National Council for Human Rights, said in an interview. “I can’t call someone who’s conspired against the state a political prisoner.”

In the last few weeks, however, some officials have begun to acknowledge the practice of imprisoning people for their political views, saying it was necessary to restore stability after the turbulence of Egypt’s 2011 Arab Spring revolution.

“There are times when the country is going through rough periods, like a period of terrorist attacks or economic reforms, when measures have to be taken,” Tarek el-Khouly, a member of Parliament, said in a recent interview.

In prison and court, there was never any pretense about the nature of the crime. According to former detainees and lawyers, guards and judges openly refer to detainees not linked to violence as “political.”

Officially, however, most pretrial detainees are accused of joining terrorist groups whether or not they have been linked to violence, allowing the authorities to round up perceived opponents in the name of security. The government does not distinguish between a militant planting bombs and a Facebook user grousing about rising prices: Both are labeled as terrorists.

An Egyptian research group that tracks the justice system has found that about 11,700 people were charged with terrorism offenses from 2013 to 2020. The vast majority, rights groups say, have not been linked to violent extremism.

“It just shows you how this terrorism charge has lost any meaning,” said Mohamed Lotfy, the executive director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, which represents political prisoners. “It’s a preposterous, irrational thing.”

The Detention Cycle

The legal framework of pretrial detention gives it the veneer of due process.

But interviews with dozens of people — including detainees, former detainees, detainees’ families, lawyers, activists and researchers — portray a system in which prosecutors and judges routinely minimize or ignore any rights the detainees have.

During the first five months of detention, detainees can legally be held for two weeks on the basis of accusations leveled by prosecutors, a period that can be extended if prosecutors request more time to investigate. That is precisely what prosecutors do for most detainees, renewing their detentions every 15 days without formal charges filed or evidence presented.

After five months, the detainee gets a hearing before a terrorism court judge, who can renew detentions for 45 days at a time.

In theory, the hearings give detainees another chance to challenge their detentions. In reality, defense lawyers are rare and evidence is almost never shown, former detainees and lawyers said.

The hearings are closed to the public, even to detainees’ families. Defendants appear in crowded, soundproof glass cages that are muted to keep them from being heard — or even from hearing their own judgments.

At five months in pretrial detention, Mr. Salem, the graduate student, advanced to terrorism court, where he waited in a soundproof cage with dozens of other defendants. When his name was called, the judge pressed a button, unmuting the cage and allowing him to speak.

“Your honor, I’m just an academic like you,” he began. “I have a daughter, please consider this.”

A lawyer who had been designated to represent Mr. Salem and half a dozen other defendants stepped up to the bench. He argued that prosecutors had shown no evidence, that the charges were vague and baseless.

The judge extended Mr. Salem’s detention for another 45 days.

He was released in December 2018, nearly seven months after his arrest. But he remains banned from travel, preventing him from seeing his 13-year-old daughter, who lives in Poland with her mother.

“I knew what to expect,” Mr. Salem said, “but hope is a tenacious thing.”

The coronavirus has put even more distance between detainees and a fair hearing. Since last year, lawyers say, officials have taken to transporting some detainees to chambers below the courtrooms without bringing them before a judge, a way of satisfying the procedural requirement of transferring them to the courthouse while keeping them from petitioning the judge, and a timesaver into the bargain.

The authorities cast such measures as Covid precautions, citing the cheek-by-jowl courtroom cages. That explanation would be more credible, lawyers and rights groups say, if prisons were not bulging with overcrowded cells, if authorities had not failed to give detainees protective equipment or if they had not kept families from supplying it.

Most hearings last just a few minutes before the judge signs the renewal orders.

“This whole thing has nothing to do with justice,” said Khaled el-Balshy, the editor of Darb, one of the few remaining media outlets that do not toe the government line. “We’re all playing a role. It’s all a charade.”

The 45-day stints can be renewed repeatedly for up to two years. After that, the law requires that the detainee be released, though that does not always happen. In many cases, prosecutors simply bring a new case, starting the two-year timer all over again.

At least 1,764 detainees were recycled into new cases from January 2018 to December 2021, according to the Egyptian Transparency Center for Research, Documentation and Data Management.

For more than a quarter of them, the center found, it was at least the second time they had been shunted into new cases. For some, it had been as many as seven times.

Ola Qaradawi, 56, and her husband, Hosam Khalaf, 59, were arrested while on a family vacation on Egypt's north coast in 2017.

The couple, both of whom hold United States permanent residency, were accused of having ties to a terrorist group. But the real crime seemed to be that they were related to a prominent critic of the military coup that brought Mr. el-Sisi to power in 2013.

After two years in prison, Ms. Qaradawi in solitary confinement, they were ordered to be released.

But instead of sending them home, guards took them to prosecutors, who accused them of committing new crimes while in prison.

“We were actually planning the party, thinking we were going to celebrate when they came out,” said their daughter, Aya Khalaf, an American citizen. “It’s like everything you’ve gone through has gone down the drain, and now they have the right to hold you again for another two years.”

Ms. Qaradawi was finally released in December 2021 after four years in detention. Her husband remains in jail.

Although there is a legal distinction between pretrial detention and a prison sentence, detention often amounts to harsh punishment.

Prisoners are held in overcrowded, filthy jails, sometimes for years. They are often deprived of visitors, bedding, food and medical treatment. Torture is common.

Rights groups say hundreds of people have died in Egyptian custody over the past five years from a combination of abysmal conditions, abuse and lack of health care.

A Widening Net

One reason people are detained for so long without trial, the government says, is that the justice system is clogged with cases. Prosecutors and courts cannot keep up with the sheer number of people getting arrested, a load that grew as Egypt widened its crusade against dissent.

Taking control after the military deposed Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mr. el-Sisi promised security and prosperity — all many Egyptians wanted after years of revolution, chaos and civil strife.

But he has used the pursuit of stability to justify deepening authoritarianism.

First, his government rounded up members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist movement that had held the presidency before Mr. el-Sisi took over, accusing it of responsibility for the militant attacks then tormenting the country. Seeing the Brotherhood as a political threat, the authorities also targeted anyone suspected of Brotherhood membership and anyone who had participated in Brotherhood-led demonstrations.

Next into detention cells came a growing number of opposition politicians, activists, journalists and academics. About 110 activists, 733 members of the media and 453 academics were arrested from 2013 to 2020, the justice system monitoring group said.

Eventually, the repression vacuumed up ordinary protesters and citizens.

When a rare smattering of anti-government protests broke out in 2019, at least 4,000 people were arrested, rights groups and lawyers estimate, including many who said they were just passing by.

Those arrests were a prelude to a much broader crackdown in which the authorities, mindful of the Arab Spring uprising that overthrew a previous president in 2011, sought to head off further unrest by arresting people they believed might have subversive ideas.

In downtown Cairo's Tahrir Square, where Facebook and Twitter helped muster hundreds of thousands of protesters in 2011, security officers began arresting passers-by after stopping them at random and searching their phones and social media accounts for political content. A dedicated unit at the Interior Ministry also combs social media for posts criticizing the government, detaining some users simply for liking and sharing others' posts, rights groups and lawyers said.

During politically sensitive anniversaries such as that marking the 2011 revolution, the police conduct raids and establish dragnets to pick up young men walking near protest hot spots.

More than 16,000 people were detained, arrested or summoned by the security services for political reasons from 2020 to 2021, according to the Egyptian Transparency Center, a figure that does not include arrests in North Sinai, where the government is fighting an Islamist insurgency and little public information is available.

Most of them went straight into pretrial detention, though most do not appear in The Times's estimate, since many were released before the five-month mark where our data began.

The surge of cases has jammed the system, backing up the courts and overcrowding prisons.

Terrorism court judges commonly struggle to get through the docket. Lawyers said they had seen sessions in which as many as 800 defendants remained packed into glass cages well past midnight.

The backlog, said Maj. Gen. Khaled Okasha, head of the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, a government-aligned research institute, makes long waits before trial "inevitable."

It has also generated a prison-building spree. Egypt has built 60 new prisons since the 2011 revolution, almost all under Mr. el-Sisi, according to news reports and the Cairo-based Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, which was recently forced to disband amid sustained government harassment.

Missing

When people disappear in Egypt — hustled from their homes by armed men in the middle of the night, seized from the street as they walk through downtown Cairo — no phone call is allotted to them. Families might wait months before learning that their loved ones have entered the limbo of pretrial detention. Some never hear a word.

Parents and siblings go knocking at police stations and national security offices, often only for officials to deny holding their relatives. It can take a week or two for suspects to be taken to a prosecutor's office in Cairo for questioning, lawyers say.

Sometimes their lawyers are waiting for them, alerted by families who presume they have been arrested. Human rights attorneys have developed a simple way to check: At hearings, they hold up a single sheet of white paper with a handwritten name, hoping someone will wave back from the defendants' cage.

Volunteer defense lawyers who come to court each day jump in to represent other detainees, the only way for some to tell their families where they are.

"The families are thrown into a vicious cycle of uncertainty because they might be dead," said Mr. Ali, the rights lawyer. "Sometimes they wish for them to turn up at the prosecution, because then they know they're alive, at least."

Egypt's Response

Stung by international criticism of its human rights abuses and anxious to appease a new American president who had vowed "no more blank checks" for Mr. el-Sisi during his campaign, the Egyptian government unveiled a "national human rights strategy" last fall. This year, as economic pressure mounted at home, Mr. el-Sisi launched a "national dialogue" — a chance, he said, for the opposition to return to the political fold and push for reforms.

A presidential committee began pardoning dozens of political detainees. Pro-government figures publicly discussed reining in the length of pretrial detentions, suggesting that such measures could be softened now that the government had largely suppressed terrorism and restored stability.

The amnesties reflected the government's "eagerness to open up to all political forces and its readiness to create a real will to engage in the national dialogue that the president has called for," Mr. el-Khouly, who serves on the pardons committee, said in a TV phone-in last month.

But even as it released some dissidents and opposition politicians, it sentenced others to prison, including, in May, a former presidential candidate arrested after criticizing Mr. el-Sisi. Politically motivated arrests continued apace. And detainees' families say that abuses in the prisons have not stopped.

Most Egyptian officials asked about the pretrial detention system declined to comment for this article. Requests sent to the state prosecutor's office, prison officials and the presidency through a government spokesman received no response.

Mr. Sallam of the National Council for Human Rights acknowledged that there were some "transgressions" in the justice system, but said that foreign rights groups and spies had exaggerated such problems to undermine the government.

In January, the Biden administration decided to withhold \$130 million of the \$1.3 billion in military aid the United States gives Egypt every year as a legacy of Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel, saying that its human rights reforms fell short of what the administration had pushed for.

But the administration released another \$170 million that was also supposed to be contingent on reform. And there was a consolation prize: a \$2.5 billion arms deal, unveiled just days before the aid cut.

Search for a Son

Sometimes the detained simply disappear into the maw of the system, never to be found again.

Abdo Abdelaziz, 82, a pickled fish trader whose small, concrete-walled apartment in the southern city of Aswan is pungent with his wares, spent the first few days after security officers arrested his son in October 2018 waiting at the police station.

He was certain his son, Gaafar, would be out soon: Gaafar was a driver, he said, a father of four with no time for politics.

“When I’d hear about someone being arrested, I’d think they must’ve done something wrong,” he said. “But because I know we’re not political, we’re not fundamentalists, I figured they’d let him go.”

When they said Gaafar was not there, he went to the courthouse, where defense lawyers said it was unsafe for them to help. Next he contacted Egypt’s chief prosecutor. When no reply came, he went to Cairo for the first time in his life on the 15-hour train, determined to shake something loose.

Turned away, he was passed off to an Aswan prosecutor, who he said asked him why he was making trouble and dismissed him.

“I thought the law was being respected, the Constitution was being respected — that’s why I went,” he said. “And I found none of that.”

Neither office replied to requests for comment.

Unscrupulous lawyers pounced on the salesman’s desperation, telling him Gaafar had been charged with joining a terrorist group. They said they could find Gaafar — maybe even help Mr. Abdelaziz see him — for about \$640.

He paid. Back he went to Cairo, another 15 hours on the train, but he never saw his son.

When nothing else worked, he tried a new approach: He went to every ward in Cairo’s notorious Tora Prison, telling the guards he was there to visit his son on the off chance that they would confirm that Gaafar was there.

The guards checked their records. They said Gaafar was not listed.

Out of ideas, Mr. Abdelaziz returned to Aswan.

More than three years later, he felt something like hope when Mr. Biden was elected.

“With Biden, maybe freedom will have some value,” Mr. Abdelaziz said.

After the American election, Egypt released more than 200 prisoners in what some interpreted as a goodwill gesture toward the incoming American president.

Soon after, rights lawyers said, at least 140 of them were recycled into new cases.

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HEADLINE	07/15 Mexico captures FBI most-wanted drug lord
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/mexico-captures-infamous-drug-lord-rafael-caro-quintero/
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY (AP) — Infamous drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero, who was behind the killing of a U.S. DEA agent in 1985, was captured Friday by Mexican forces nearly a decade after walking out of a Mexican prison and returning to drug trafficking, Mexico’s navy said.</p> <p>Caro Quintero was arrested after a search dog named “Max” found him hiding in brush in the town of San Simon in Sinaloa state during a joint operation by the navy and Attorney General’s Office, a navy</p>

statement said. The site was in the mountains near Sinaloa's border with the northern border state of Chihuahua.

Mexico's national arrest registry listed the time of Caro Quintero's arrest as around midday. There were two pending arrest orders for him as well as an extradition request from the U.S. government.

Mexico's Attorney General's Office said in a statement late Friday that Caro Quintero was arrested for extradition and would be held at the maximum security Altiplano prison about 50 miles west of Mexico City.

A very short video segment released by the navy showed Caro Quintero — his face blurred — dressed in jeans, a soaking wet blue shirt and baggy khaki jacket held by both arms by men wearing camouflage uniforms and carrying assault rifles.

A navy Blackhawk helicopter carrying 15 people crashed near the coastal city of Los Mochis during the operation, killing 14 of those aboard, the navy statement said. The available information indicated it suffered an "accident," the cause of which had not yet been determined, the statement said.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said via Twitter that the helicopter crashed shortly before landing after supporting those who conducted the capture of Caro Quintero. He expressed condolences to the families of the victims and said the crash would be investigated.

Caro Quintero had walked free in 2013 after 28 years in prison when a court overturned his 40-year sentence for the 1985 kidnapping and killing of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena. The brutal murder marked a low point in U.S.-Mexico relations.

Caro Quintero, the former leader of the Guadalajara cartel, had since returned to drug trafficking and unleashed bloody turf battles in the northern Mexico border state of Sonora.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has maintained that he is not interested in detaining drug lords and prefers to avoid violence.

But the arrest came just days after López Obrador met with U.S. President Joe Biden in the White House.

There had been tensions between the Mexican government and the DEA after Mexico enacted a law limiting the U.S. agency's operations. But recently, the DEA's new head in Mexico received a visa, which the U.S. officials marked as a sign of progress in the relationship.

Shortly before Caro Quintero's arrest Friday, U.S. Ambassador Ken Salazar told a gathering of reporters there had been progress in the security relationship.

"I have been in meetings with the foreign minister and with the security Cabinet, along with all our agencies that have included the new head of the DEA sitting at my right hand," Salazar said. "So if we weren't welcome here in Mexico that wouldn't happen."

An appeals court overturned Caro Quintero's verdict in 2013, but the Supreme Court upheld the sentence. It was too late by then; Caro Quintero was spirited off in a waiting vehicle.

He was on the FBI's most wanted list, with a \$20 million reward for his capture through the State Department's Narcotics Rewards Program. He was added to the FBI's top 10 most wanted list in 2018.

Caro Quintero was one of the primary suppliers of heroin, cocaine, and marijuana to the United States in the late 1970s. He blamed Camarena for a raid on a marijuana plantation in 1984. In 1985, Camarena was kidnapped in Guadalajara, allegedly on orders from Caro Quintero. His tortured body was found a month later.

Late Friday, U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland expressed the U.S. government's deep gratitude to Mexican authorities for Caro Quintero's arrest and offered condolences for the Mexican military personnel who died in the helicopter crash.

"There is no hiding place for anyone who kidnaps, tortures, and murders American law enforcement," he said in a statement. "Today's arrest is the culmination of tireless work by DEA and their Mexican partners to bring Caro-Quintero to justice for his alleged crimes, including the torture and execution of DEA Special Agent Enrique 'Kiki' Camarena. We will be seeking his immediate extradition to the United States so he can be tried for these crimes in the very justice system Special Agent Camarena died defending."

Mike Vigil, the DEA's former chief of international operations, said Caro Quintero was believed to have been operating independently most recently, though there had been rumors he was back with the Sinaloa cartel.

Caro Quintero was from Badiraguato, Sinaloa, the same area as Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, the former Sinaloa cartel leader now serving a life sentence in the United States. He eventually became one of the "godfathers" of Mexican drug trafficking.

Vigil said he was surprised by Caro Quintero's arrest, considering López Obrador's stated disinterest in going after drug cartel leaders, but he added that the DEA would never stop looking for someone who killed an agent.

"We didn't see a lot of effort (to capture Caro Quintero) in the last several years, especially when (López Obrador) came in and immediately started to dismantle a lot of the infrastructure and the bilateral relationships between the U.S. and Mexico relative to drug trafficking," Vigil said.

In Sonora, one of the state's hit hardest by Caro Quintero's efforts to reclaim his territory, there was a hope his arrest could help.

"I believe in Sonora, in general, there could be calm, and yes, relief for us, because I believe the disappearances will diminish," said Cecilia Duarte, an activist with a team of volunteer searchers in Sonora who look for the clandestine graves of the disappeared. Some activists have been threatened and even killed in Sonora amid Caro Quintero's turf wars with the sons of "El Chapo."

But, Duarte said, Caro Quintero "is only part (of the conflict), the conflict doesn't end."

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